1-1-1998

Tani prachanaigal (water problems) : interpersonal conflict resolution practices of a plantation Tamil labor community in Sri Lanka : a qualitative case study.

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TANI PRACHANAIGAL (WATER PROBLEMS). INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION PRACTICES OF A PLANTATION TAMIL LABOR COMMUNITY IN SRI LANKA: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

A Dissertation Presented

by

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Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1998

Education

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PLANTATION TAMIL LABOR COMMUNITY

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Dedicated to the laborers of *Sooryan* plantation who never stop dreaming for a better future for their children. Their hope is revolutionary.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to many individuals, the labor plantation community at *Sooryan*, and several organizations in Sri Lanka who made my stay in Sri Lanka not only enjoyable but made this study possible. During the course of this study, I faced many difficulties in Sri Lanka. Had I not known several individuals in Sri Lanka, I would have not completed this study. The oppression connected with the plantation system extends to those who want to affiliate themselves with the laborers at any plantation in Sri Lanka as well. Almost all plantation managers denied my request for this study.

I was lucky to have met Noel Sylvester who worked as my research assistant and introduced me to the managers of *Sooryan* who granted permission for this study. Noel's excellent linguistic abilities and empathy with the plantation community was a great resource for me. His hard work and openness helped me stay motivated and complete this study. During the course of this study, I came to know his family who took me in as one of their own. I owe a special thanks to his family who at times wondered what I was doing but never the less provided me with hot meals, tea, and a warm place to sleep even as late as 3 a.m. I am also grateful to Rani who worked hard and walked many plantation hills to interview women laborers with me. Her community development experience among the plantation community proved crucial in approaching the *Sooryan* labor community in a respectful manner

Fr. Paul Caspersz, director, and the staff of *Satyodaya*, a non-governmental organization in Kandy, frequently provided me with hospitality and a base at their library. They offered me many suggestions and took genuine interest in my research. The

librarians at *Satyodaya*. Priyanthi and Geeta always greeted me with smiles and showed me many books and journal articles on the tea plantations. It was here that I began to learn about the plantations in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. I thank Fr. Paul Caspersz for arranging an opportunity for me to present the interim findings of my research to a diverse audience in Sri Lanka and get their comments. I am grateful to Siva, the cook at *Satyodaya*, whose delicious meals never left me missing my own from Pakistan.

I am thankful to Professor M. Sinnathamby of Peradeniya University, Professor S. Sivathamby of Eastern University in Batticaloa, Mr. Muralitharan of Sri Pada College near Patna, Mr. Balakrishnan of MIRGE, and Mr. Muthulingam of the Institute for Social Development for offering many useful suggestions in planning my study. I am grateful to Mr. Muthulingam and his staff for taking me to various tea plantations and suggesting appropriate ways to approach the management of several plantations. Whenever I felt stuck, they helped me through. Professors Sinnathamby and Sivathamby sustained my interest by asking questions, taking an active interest, and offering many useful suggestions. In addition, the families of the above were generous with their hospitality and friendship.

In a very special way, I am grateful to the labor community at *Sooryan*. All of them accepted me in their homes, offered many insights, and gently corrected my Tamil when I made mistakes. I enjoyed their warm hospitality and appreciated their invitations to temples, singing of hymns and to their annual festival at *Sooryan*. The youth of *Sooryan*, especially Guru and Craigelee became my friends and helped me in many ways. On several occasions, they came to assist me with my luggage at the Kotegalla railway station, took me to their homes for meals, and played carom when I stayed at their school.

To these and others at *Sooryan*, I am greatly indebted. Their courage to dream for a better future while living on a plantation is revolutionary.

At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, I am grateful to my committee members. Professor Patt Dodds helped me greatly in writing my comprehensive paper, which became the basis for this study. She never forgot me when I was in Sri Lanka and offered useful suggestions and advice on this dissertation. She took a genuine interest in me and in my research. I am thankful to Professor Robert Faulkner's advice and guidance. At crucial times, he motivated me by saying that I have something interesting to write and that I should "have faith." I am thankful to Professor Robert Miltz, the chair of my committee, for guiding the process of this study and giving many useful comments.

Finally, I owe a very special gratitude to Cara Siano my friend and partner who accompanied me to Sri Lanka. She listened to me when my research questions were still vague and was patient when we faced endless difficulties including getting a long-term visa to stay in Sri Lanka. She read many drafts of my proposal and this dissertation, corrected them, and offered useful insights. In particular, she never failed to encourage me to write.

ABSTRACT

TANI PRACHANAIGAL (WATER PROBLEMS). INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION PRACTICES OF A PLANTATION TAMIL LABOR COMMUNITY IN SRI LANKA: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

MAY 1998

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Due to a worldwide increase in migration, refugees, and migrant laborers, interpersonal conflicts today are more frequent and complex. The young field of interpersonal conflict resolution is therefore being looked to for answers. Practitioners all over the globe are limited by the conflict resolution literature which is mostly written from a western perspective. There is a need to explore interpersonal conflict resolution practices of different cultural groups and societies with different histories of oppression. In a 15-month qualitative research study, I explored interpersonal conflict resolution practices of a Tamil labor community on a tea plantation in Sri Lanka called *Sooryan.*

The first part of the study traces the establishment of plantations in Sri Lanka by the British. It differentiates between plantation and non-plantation societies. The works of Jayaraman (1975), Beckford (1983), Wesumperuma (1986), Daniel (1993), and Hollup (1994) help trace the cultural, economic, and political factors which cause conflicts on

plantations. This part also explores interpersonal conflict resolution practices in different societies, and presents four third-party conflict resolution models practiced in non-plantation societies.

The second part describes the labor community at *Sooryan* plantation. It explains the living and working conditions of the laborers, and the role of *Talaivars* (leaders) and trade union representatives. It examines discrimination faced by the laborers from the outside non-plantation community. It highlights the machine bureaucracy and the management style at *Sooryan*.

The third part explores four categories of interpersonal conflicts, which manifest within-family, between laborers, between laborers and their supervisors, and between the labor plantation community and the outside non-plantation community. It describes processes which the labor community uses in resolving their conflicts. Challenges are posed to practitioners and educators by contrasting the conflict resolution practices of the *Sooryan* labor community with the mainstream mediation model of the United States.

Finally, the study examines the unique problems of the labor community and how its social, economic, and political isolation makes its conflicts permanent. With this understanding, further research and effective educational programs can be developed for plantation societies, migrant laborers, and refugees. To this end, the daily water problems of the *Sooryan* labor community in Sri Lanka serve as a timely reminder.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an outcome of my reflection on living as an immigrant in the United States and living and working among people from different cultural, economic, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. In my desire to make the United States my home, I had to re-learn some of the important cultural behaviors and values in order to interact and live with those who had been socialized differently. The reflection and lessons from it became increasingly necessary as I worked among Afghan refugees, Peace Corps and British volunteers, German activists, and Pakistani, Armenian, Sinhalese, and Tamil community workers. This journey of discovering myself among "others" in very concrete social, political and cultural realities is not over. It is an ongoing one, both painful and joyful. I aspire to continue on this journey.

I first came into contact with the plantation Tamils of Sri Lanka in 1994. As a member of an international election delegation, I monitored the presidential and parliamentary elections held in August and November 1994, respectively. In November, while monitoring the parliamentary elections with the members of a local non-governmental organization (NGO), I opted to visit the tea plantations and monitored the election-day activities there. It was here that I first met members of the Tamil plantation community and learned about their history of coming from India to work on plantations in Sri Lanka. Intrigued by how they live in isolation and yet contribute significantly to Sri Lanka's economy by working on tea plantations, I returned with a grant to conduct field work for this study among the laborers of a tea plantation.

In this dissertation, I describe a case study that explores interpersonal conflict resolution practices of a plantation Tamil labor community in Sri Lanka. The field research was conducted in Sri Lanka between April of 1996 and July of 1997. Using qualitative research methods of interviewing, focus groups, and participant observations, I explore how interpersonal conflicts become manifest in this community and what mechanisms are used to resolve them.

Use of Language

I have three points to make regarding the use of English in this study. First, some of the literature described in the study uses British English spellings. For example, the word "labor" in American English is spelled as "labour" in British and South Asian English. I have chosen to use British and South Asian English spellings as they are quoted in the literature. However, in writing this dissertation, I have used the American English spellings.

Secondly, I am aware of the sexist ways pronouns have historically been used in the English language. For example when "he" is used it is assumed that it refers to "she" also. In quoting such uses in the literature, I have chosen to put parentheses around the pronoun.

Thirdly, I grew up in Pakistan and learned Punjabi and Urdu before learning English. I have been educated in Pakistan and in the United States. I have been taught to write differently in each country. In writing this study, I have tried to accommodate the style of writing predominant in the United States. However, I believe writing is a cultural expression also. Formulating thoughts and ideas and expressing them is part of one's socialization and education. Therefore, my developed socialized ways of expression are present in this study.

Definition of Terms

I have chosen two ways to define terms that are used in this study. In the first instance, the majority of the terms have been defined in the text itself. This I believe gives a better understanding of a term when read in its overall context. Secondly, I have defined below some of the terms, which I think are essential at the beginning of this study. These terms are defined below:

I find the term "Conflict" difficult to define. LeResche (1990) also identifies this difficulty and notes that this term is sometimes differentiated and sometimes combined with other terms like problems, disputes, disagreements, arguments, quarrels, troubles, discords, and fights. The difficulty magnifies when working cross-culturally or when a researcher or a practitioner does not know the language/s of the participants.

For this study, I have chosen to use Duryea's (1992) definition. She states:

> conflict as an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce reward and resources, and interference from other party in achieving their goals. Conflict is natural in society, between individuals and between social units including cultural groups, is probably desirable and needs to be addressed if there is to be personal, social or institutional change (p. 5).

For the purposes of this study, "Interpersonal Conflicts" are those conflicts which manifest among family members, between neighbors, between a laborer and a supervisor, or between laborers from a tea plantation community and members or institutions outside a plantation.

Like the term "Conflict," the term Conflict Resolution is also difficulty to define. However, for the purposes of this study, I have chosen to use the definition of Burton (1996) who states:

> It implies problem solving by deeply analytical means. No element of coercion is implied. The implication is that all parties to the conflict freely agree once they have redefined and reperceived relationships, and once they have done their costing, that is once they have examined and taken into account all the relevant elements of relationships (p. 40).

According to Beckford (1983), a "Plantation" is a system of agricultural production as well as a social institution. Here, I provide a definition, which explains the agricultural aspects of the plantation. In the body of this study, social aspects of the plantations are explained in detail.

Jones (1968) defines:

> A plantation is an economic unit producing agricultural commodities (field crops or horticultural products, but not livestock) for sale and employing a relatively large number of unskilled laborers whose activities are closely supervised. Plantations usually employ a year-round labor crew of some size, and they usually specialize in the production of only one or two marketable products (p. 154).

Statement of the Problem

As a result of the great number of people migrating in search of better economic opportunities or to escape war or environmental degradation, the incidence of interpersonal conflicts is increasing. One often hears of racist and xenophobic policies and popular reactions to the growing number of immigrants in Western Europe and North America. Elsewhere, countries with refugees and migrant labor populations are also facing interpersonal conflicts, which are complex and frequent.

Living in multiethnic societies around the world is a reality for many people and this necessitates learning new cultural perspectives and acquiring new cultural skills to appreciate and understand problems of a particular ethnic group. Models of interpersonal conflict resolution, which are rooted in respective cultures, can teach us not only to value different perspectives but to critically understand what contributes to these conflicts.

The young field of conflict resolution has gained considerable importance of late. However, the current literature on interpersonal conflict resolution mostly comes from the West. This results in practitioners using the western literature even when working among communities which are ethnically and culturally different. The writings of authors such as Lederach (1986;1990;1991;1995), LeResche (1990), Duryea (1992), Shook (1992), and Siemens (1996) on non-western conflict resolution practices clearly demonstrate the many opportunities for further research in this field.

For example, Lederach (1986) is critical of the North American mediation model, which he says:

> assumes that people should take responsibilities "individually" to resolve their conflicts. That is an empowering thing, but it assumes a strong emphasis on "I" and a weak on the "we". There are many people in the world who strongly emphasize the "we" (p. 24).

Lederach (1986) points to another aspect of the North American mediation model: the emphasis on mediators as "neutral and impartial." He writes that in the West "We establish legitimacy through distance from the persons in the conflict"; whereas in other cultures "legitimacy is established by trust, knowledge of, and confidence in who this person is - not by distance" (p. 24).

In order for service providers to work effectively among diverse communities, they will have to understand the interpersonal conflict resolution models with which an ethnic community is familiar. Additionally, they have to explore concrete societal structures, which contribute towards these conflicts, thereby limiting a possible repeat of conflicts rooted in these structures. This has a better potential of resolving the interpersonal conflicts and in creating communities, which can coexist side by side.

Significance of the Study

This study seeks to contribute to the field in the following four ways; Firstly, it will assist both western and eastern practitioners who rely on models developed in the West for mostly Anglo-European communities. When working with communities, which are ethnically and culturally different, it may be helpful to learn from the practices of a plantation Tamil community in Sri Lanka.

Secondly, this study will aid educators and service providers who work among growing numbers of refugees, migrant workers, and internally displaced people all over the world. Of particular significance for their work will be an understanding of interpersonal conflicts, which are rooted in a given cultural or situational context.

Thirdly, I believe interpersonal conflicts in a minority group are often concrete manifestations of inequalities, economic hardships, social and cultural isolation, and discriminatory treatment from a majority ethnic group. Thus, this study will point to some of the root causes of interpersonal conflicts among a plantation Tamil community which can be further investigated by community development organizations to aid in the development of educational and empowerment programs.

Finally, this is the first study aimed at uncovering the interpersonal conflict resolution practices of a predominantly plantation-labor community in Sri Lanka. As such, it will greatly enhance the current debates and general body of knowledge about the present plantation structures, which are widely considered to exploit labor.

Assumptions

Central to the proposed dissertation is the assumption that interpersonal conflicts are natural and present in all cultural groups. Secondly, it is assumed that interpersonal conflicts are often manifestations of unjust economic, social, and political structures.

Traditionally small farmers, the Tamils were brought from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu in the 19th century by the British to work as resident laborers on plantations in Sri Lanka. They have and continue to live in almost total isolation from the dominant Sinhalese cultural group. It is likely, especially initially that their isolation as a separate residential labor force encouraged the continuity of certain cultural practices such as interpersonal conflict resolution. However, such factors as the rigid British plantation structure under which they lived and worked, the post-Independence Sinhalese management and inclusion of non-Tamil day-laborers, the powerful role of trade unions in all aspects of plantation life and work, and their isolation from other plantation and non-plantation Tamil communities may have contributed to the loss of important cultural practices over time. Additionally, these factors may have also led the owners of plantations to impose conflict resolution practices, which the laborers were not culturally socialized in.

Organization

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the study, explains the problem, and highlights the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 provides essential literature that lays down the foundations to understand this study. The chapter has three main parts. In the first part, I describe the country of Sri Lanka and its people. I present important information on its population, geographic location, religions, and major languages. I devote a considerable portion to providing

information about the plantation Tamils among whom the study was conducted. I explain how the plantations in Sri Lanka were established, and how labor was recruited from India through a system known as *Kangani*. I conclude the first section by providing information about the present plantations in Sri Lanka and the labor force, which works on them.

The second part explores literature with which to understand different cultural groups including the plantation ones. I explain specific "contexts" which are peculiar to plantations. These contexts are connected to the plantation population group, which was studied for this research.

The third part explores conflict resolution practices from four different cultural groups. They include: 1) Mainstream Mediation Model used in the United States, 2) Korean-American Harmony Model, 3) Hawaiian *Ho'oponopono* Model, and 4) Pakistan *Jirga* and *Panchayat* Models. After all of the models are described, each is analyzed using appropriate literature. Finally, the non-western conflict resolution models are synthesized and a typology of the literature, reviewed is presented.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this study and presents the rationale for using qualitative research. It describes the methods of participant observation, focus groups and personal interviews used to collect data. It reports how permission from the management of the plantation company and access to the people on the plantation was gained. It explains how the trust-worthiness of the study was established. It also explains the difficulties I faced before and while conducting the research.

Chapter 4 presents the setting of the plantation, *Sooryan*. It explains the location and the general layout of the tea plantation. It describes the staff, the laborers, and the nature of their work on the plantation. It elaborates on the role of *Talaivar*, trade unions,

and the management and their relationship with the laborers. The chapter also describes a typical work day for the labor force at *Sooryan* and describes some of the social and religious activities in which I participated. Finally, the chapter describes the community outside and near the plantation and the nature of its relationship with the plantation community.

Chapter 5 is titled "Laboring among Conflicts." It explains some Tamil words and phrases used by the community to approximate the English language equivalent of "interpersonal conflict." Using Tamil words and phrases from interviews and observations, four categories of interpersonal conflicts are explained. The chapter concludes with a description of the ways interpersonal conflicts are resolved or dealt with by the laborers at the *Sooryan* plantation.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the findings from *Sooryan* and compares the interpersonal conflict resolution practices of the plantation community with the mainstream mediation model used in North America. For this comparison, literature from that cited in chapter 2 is used. Through the comparison, challenges to practitioners working both in the West and East are posed. The chapter highlights the main conclusion of the study and makes recommendations for the practitioners and educators in the field of conflict resolution. In particular, it sets out an agenda for future research in interpersonal conflict resolution among minority groups.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides essential literature that lays down the foundations for understanding this study. The chapter has three main parts. In the first part, I describe the country of Sri Lanka and its people. I present important information on its population, geographic location, religions, and major languages. I devote a considerable portion to providing information about the plantation Tamils among whom the study was conducted. I explain how the plantations in Sri Lanka were established, and how laborers were recruited from India through a system known as *Kangani*. I conclude the first section by providing information about the present plantations in Sri Lanka and the labor force, which works on them.

The second part explores literature with which to understand different plantation and non-plantation societies. I explain specific "contexts" which are peculiar to the plantation societies and trace how these contexts contribute towards interpersonal conflicts of the laborers.

The third part explores interpersonal conflict resolution practices from four different cultural groups. They include: 1) The mainstream Mediation Model used in the United States, 2) The Korean-American Harmony Model, 3) The Hawaiian *Ho'oponopono* Model, and 4) The Pakistan *Jirga* and *Panchayat* Models. After presenting each of the models, they are analyzed using appropriate literature. Finally, the non-western conflict resolution models are synthesized and a typology of various conflict resolution models is presented.

The Country and People of Sri Lanka

The country of Sri Lanka is an island of 18 million people located off the southern tip of India, with a land area of 65,610 square kilometers. The island is shaped like a pear or, according to the locals, a tear drop. The country is 270 miles long and 140 miles wide. The country closest to Sri Lanka is India, from which it is separated in the north by a narrow sea strip known as the Palk Strait (Hollup, 1994). Formerly called Ceylon[1], the official name of the country is now the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. Colombo located in the south-west coastal area of the country is the capital.

The ethnic composition of Sri Lanka's population is 74% Sinhalese, 13% Sri Lankan Tamils, 5.5% Indian (plantation) Tamils, 7.1% Muslims and 0.8% others. These ethnic groups represent four major religions in Sri Lanka. Some 69.3% are Buddhist, 15.5% are Hindu, 7.6% are Christian, and 7.5% are Muslim (Hollup, 1994).

In his work, Hollup (1994) provides a useful overview of the people of Sri Lanka. He notes that most of the Sinhalese live in villages and urban areas in the island's most populous region, the fertile wet zone (p. 2). Because of geographic and historical differences, this majority group has been further divided into two categories: the Low Country Sinhalese (Patte ratte, 68%) and the Kandyan Sinhalese (Ude ratte, 32%). According to Hollup (1994), the Low Country Sinhalese mostly live on the coastal areas and had contacts with the Portuguese colonists beginning in 1505, with the Dutch during their occupation of 1656-1796, and finally with the British under their rule in 1796-1948.

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[1] Until 1972, the country was known as Ceylon. During my stay in Sri Lanka from April 1996 to July 1997, I noticed that some government departments, such as the Ceylon Tourist Board still, use the old name.

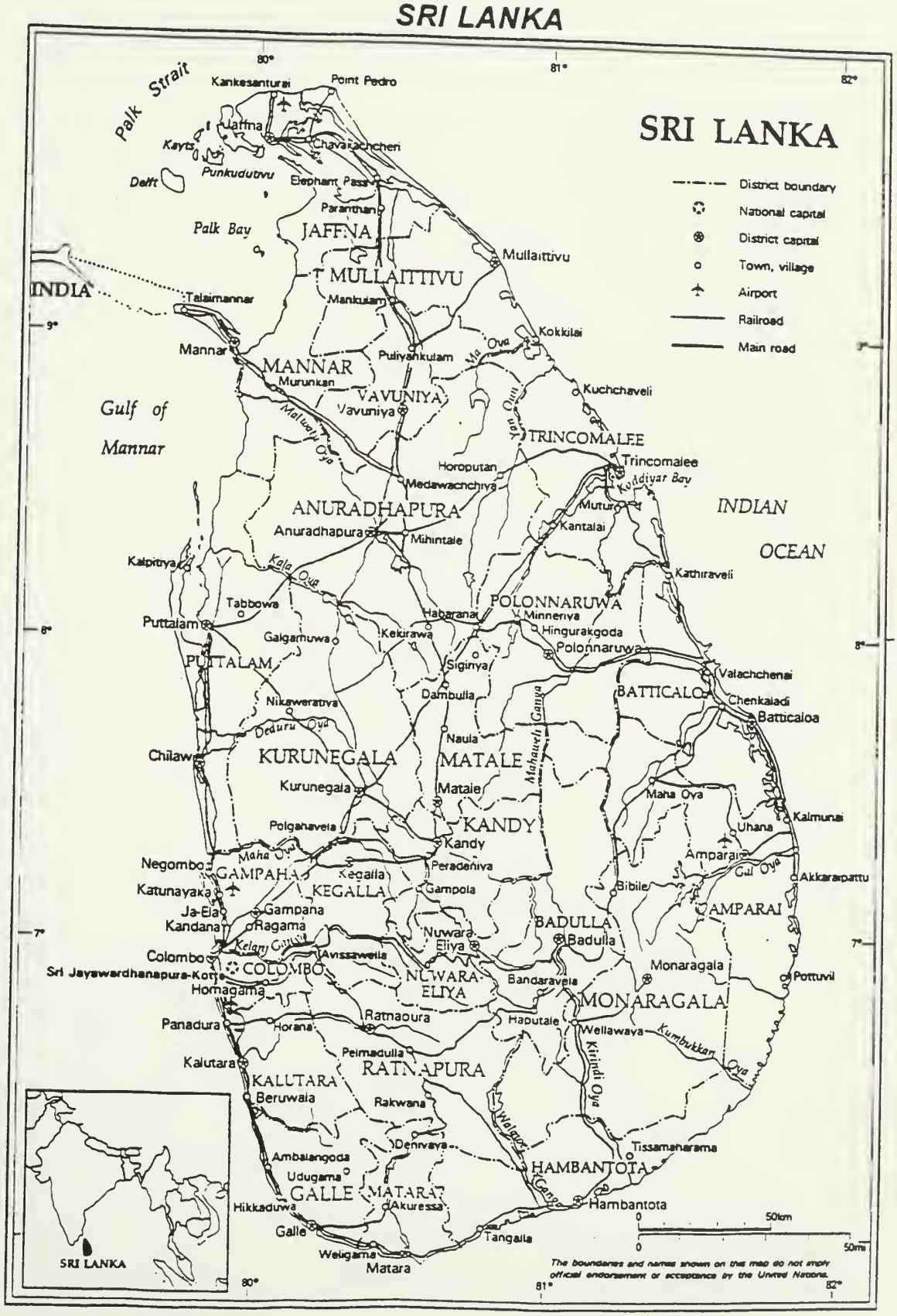

Figure 2.1 Map of Sri Lanka. Source: Asia & Oceania Today (1995), p. 259

The Kandyan Sinhalese, on the other hand, mostly live in villages and towns in the hilly areas of the Central and Uva provinces and in villages in the North Central plains. Unlike the Low Country Sinhalese who had regular contact with all three colonial powers, the Kandyan Sinhalese were an isolated feudal Kandyan kingdom until opening relations with the British in 1815 (p. 4). Both Low Country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese are mostly Buddhist (92%) while the remainder are Catholic.

The second biggest ethnic group is the Sri Lankan Tamils (13%). According to Hollup, they are "the most dominant" of Sri Lanka's minorities. Hollup (1994) also notes that the Tamils are indigenous to Sri Lanka and inhabit a "distinct territory" in the nation's northern and eastern provinces (p. 5). While in Sri Lanka, I often heard this minority group referred to as "Jaffna Tamils". Jaffna is a city in the north but members of this ethnic group also live in the eastern cities of Trincomalee and Baticaloa. Perhaps this term is used because most of them are concentrated in the Jaffna Peninsula (Hollup, p. 5).

Most of the Sri Lankan Tamils are Hindu (84%), with the remaining practice Catholicism. Some 9% live in Colombo and are engaged in business or work as professionals or clerks in the city. They are known for valuing higher education and in the past have held a great number of civil jobs. According to Hollup (1994), the Sri Lankan Tamils who live in the north and east work in a number of different occupations, including paddy farming, cash crops, fishing, government jobs, and trade (p. 5).

The next minority group, comprised of Muslims, make up 7.1% of the country's total population. They speak Tamil as their first language and "consider themselves to be the descendants of the Arab traders who have intermarried with the Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils" (Hollup, pp. 5-6). They are largely concentrated in the eastern province.

However, concentrations of Muslims are also found in the cities of Colombo, Matale, Kandy, Galle, and Jaffna.

The other minorities that constitute less than 1% of the total population include Malays, Burghers, Indian Muslims and Veddahs. The Malays are Muslims who were recruited by the British and the Dutch into a Malay army regiment. Today, they mostly live in Colombo and work in police, army and office jobs. Burghers are mostly Christians, speak English and live in Colombo or other urban areas. They are descendants of Dutch and Portuguese settlers who intermarried with the locals. The Veddahs are indigenous people who have intermarried with rural Sinhalese and Tamils. They mostly live in the jungles of Uva province (Hollup, 1994).

The three most common languages in Sri Lanka are Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Constitutionally, both Sinhala and Tamil are national and official languages of the country. English is widely used in government offices, businesses, universities, and in the tourist industry. During my stay in the country, I found that most Tamils were tri-lingual (Tamil, Sinhala, and English) and most Sinhalese were bilingual (Sinhala and English).

The next section traces the history of Tamils who were recruited by the British to work on various plantations in Sri Lanka. The section provides information on how the plantations were established and the labor recruited from the southern state of India, Tamil Nadu.

Plantation Tamils

In the preceding section, I described various ethnic groups in Sri Lanka and their religious affiliations. Another minority group, the Tamils, comprise 5.5% of the total population.

This ethnic group has been called by different names over their history in Sri Lanka. In his work, Daniel (1992) provides some terms by which these Tamils have been called. They include Estate Tamils, Tamils of Indian Origin, Indian Tamils, Tamils of Recent Indian Origins, Hill Country Tamils and New Tamils (pp. 2-5). Nadesan (1993) calls them Up-Country Tamil People (p. 3).

This study was conducted among the Tamils who live and work on a tea plantation in Sri Lanka. For the purposes of this dissertation, they will be referred to as plantation Tamils. In describing them Hollup (1994) notes:

> Estate Tamils (Indian Tamils), another Tamil-speaking ethnic group, descendants of immigrants from South India, were brought to Sri Lanka to work on the estates established by the British in the middle of the last century. The majority of the Estate Tamils are plantation workers who live on numerous tea and rubber estates in the central highlands (pp. 2-5).

In explaining the history of migration of plantation Tamils from the southern state of Tamil Nadu in India to Sri Lanka, Wesumperuma (1986) notes that:

> Immigration from India to Sri Lanka is as old as the history of Sri Lanka itself. However, the movement in the nineteenth century was sharply distinct in character from the earlier ones. While the earlier movements were primarily of a political and cultural nature, the nineteenth century influx was predominately an economic movement set off mainly by the need to provide wage labour for the coffee plantations (p. 1).

Development of Plantations

According to Wesumperuma (1986), three significant changes prepared the way for the growth of coffee plantations in Sri Lanka. (pp. 2-3). Firstly, the British imposed a

unified system of administrative and legal superstructure over the traditional areas of Kandyan Sinhalese officialdom. This ensured "for the British the political hegemony and stability so necessary for economic infiltration" (p. 3). Secondly, the peasants of the Kandy region were tied to their landlords in a system called *Rajakariya,* in which every citizen had to perform services without any remuneration. The British abolished this system in the hopes that the laborers freed from the obligations under *Rajakariya* would be available to work on the plantations. Thirdly, a road was constructed in the 1820s linking the coastal capital of Colombo to Kandy in the hill areas. This was done for "strategic and administrative purposes" and for the British to accomplish the "subsequent economic infiltration" (p. 3).

The above changes paved the way for British capital and enterprise to penetrate into the Kandyan region and begin developing the coffee plantations in 1835. The capital and the enterprise came from two sources: first from British officials in Sri Lanka and subsequently from British entrepreneurs (p. 5).

The British established the early plantations in areas adjoining Sinhalese peasant villages. Some of the village lands were encroached upon for the purposes of establishing plantations and thus Sinhalese villages "became hemmed in amidst plantations" (p. 5). Wesumperuma (1986) notes that the British discovered that the best land for the coffee was above 1700 feet and for the purposes of establishing plantations, the British government sold forest land at a very low price of five shillings an acre. The "coffee mania" which started in the early 1840s resulted in vast Crown forest land being sold to prospective planters and speculators; this sale "continued during the succeeding decades of the coffee industry" (p. 5).

It is also worth mentioning that in the time period during, which the plantations were established in Sri Lanka, the British were ruling the greater India (including now the countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh). They used their colonial administrative powers and the knowledge of the region to their advantage.

Nadesan (1993) gives some examples. He points out that most of the hill country was "clad in evergreen forests. The soil was rich and the climate suitable for the development of the plantation industry" (pp. 3-4). In order to make that land available for the plantations, the British issued two ordinances; 1) Crown Land Ordinance of 1840 and 2) Waste Land Ordinance of 1897 (p. 4).

George Bird started the first coffee plantation in 1924 near Gampola called Sinhapitya. Bird was a friend of then Governor Barnes who himself started a coffee plantation in 1825 near the Royal Botanical Gardens at Peradeniya. Soon after Governor Barnes "abolished the export duty on coffee and, in 1927 he suspended the land tax on coffee plantations" (Nedesan, p. 17).

Labor for the Plantations

Once the development of the plantations started, there was a great demand for labor to clear the forest and prepare the plantations. It was hoped that with the abolition of *Rajakariya*, peasants would be motivated to work on the plantations as wage workers. However, this did not materialize as "most of the villagers had access to land" and they showed no interest in working on the plantations set up by the British (Hollup, 1994, p. 20).

Once the British could not find the labor locally for their plantations, they searched outside the country. As Wesumperuma (1986) explains, "just as the African

coast supplied slave labour for the economic development of the First British Empire, India and China turned out to be the largest reservoir of wage labour for the economic progress of the Second British Empire" (p. 8). In the case of Sri Lanka, the British planters turned to the southern state of Tamil Nadu in India for labor.

The laborers recruited from the state of Tamil Nadu in India were generally poor. As Wesumperuma (1986) notes, "In South India a considerable section of the population lived at a minimum level of subsistence" (p. 10). According to Hollup (1994) there were two factors in recruiting the labor from southern India: Firstly, there was extreme poverty, landlessness, famines and overpopulation in south India which served as "push factors" and secondly in Sri Lanka there was a great demand for labor on the plantations and since Sri Lanka is so close to India, it served as "pull factors" for the population in southern India to avail themselves of job opportunities (pp. 20-21).

Wesumperuma (1986) attributes the British plan of recruiting labor from southern India to the following:

> They saw several advantages in recruiting South Indians--advantages which the planters would not gain by employing the Kandyans. Firstly, the Indians would reside on the estates at least for several months and the planters could rely on their labour during the period. Secondly, Indian labour was cheap. . . Thirdly, the Indian labourers moved away from their homes, would be more amenable to discipline. . . Once the planters found that the import of South Indian labourers was in their interest, they made no serious attempt to harness any possible sources of indigenous labour (p. 20).

In addition to their being poor, the labor from Tamil Nadu also belonged to low caste in India. Their poverty and low caste status made them ideal for recruiting. It is important here to briefly explore their caste identities and how these were used in recruiting and maintaining control over them.

According to Jayaraman (1975), the labor from India was Hindu and "every Hindu is born into a *jati* or sub-caste. A number of sub-castes together form a large caste" (p. 49). He also points out that membership to a caste is through birth only. On one end of the spectrum are the high caste Brahmans, traditionally Hindu priests. On the other hand are lowest castes, who work as sweepers and leather workers, and their work consists of disposing of "dead animals and human excreta" (p. 50).

According to Jayaraman (1975), the castes of the plantation workers "can be grouped into two broad hierarchical divisions viz., Non-Brahman or *Kudiyanavan* (lit., cultivator) and *Adi-Dravida* or untouchable" (p. 66). The untouchable group consists of *Pallan*, *Paraiyan* and *Chakkiliyan* castes, which are not allowed to own property (Jayaraman). Thus, it can be deduced that the majority of the labor recruited from Tamil Nadu belonged to the untouchable castes.

When the emigration stared in 1839, it was seasonal and the laborers returned back to their native villages in South India after harvesting the coffee. The number of laborers varied according to the economic hardships in India or the boom conditions in Sri Lanka. Hollup (1994) notes that during the great Indian famine of 1877-78, the migration of labor to Sri Lanka reached a peak of 150,000 laborers (p. 21).

In 1886, a fungus brought the coffee industry to its end. In providing details of its aftermath, Hollup (1994) notes that "reduced yields and the death of coffee bushes turned thousands of acres unprofitable" (p. 21). After the coffee disaster, the British planters converted the existing infrastructure of land, labor, and capital used in the coffee production to tea cultivation. As tea grew on a much wider range of altitude than coffee,

more land was made available for tea cultivation, creating a greater demand for the Indian labor (Hollup, 1994).

Unlike coffee, "tea production required a continuous and frequent harvesting of leaves and attention and care from large labour force to see to the general upkeep of the tea plantations" (p. 23). This necessitated a residential labor force. Permanent settlements were created on the plantations and women and children were recruited to work on these tea plantations (Hollup, 1994). In order to run the plantations well, the British planters turned to a system called *Kangani*. The word *Kangani* "is a significant term in Tamil, meaning, one who keeps an eye on the labourers" (Nadesan, 1993, p. 22). In other words, it means a supervisor. In turning to this system, the British had two aims: First, to recruit more laborers and secondly, to retain the recruited laborers on the tea plantations (Nadesan, 1993).

Kangani System of Recruiting Indian Labor

The *Kangani* system was first developed by the coffee planters and later used by the tea planters. Generally, a *Kangani* or head *Kangani* was the senior male member of the family who was selected by the white planters to recruit laborers in India. This man was generally an influential man selected from among the laborers. The title of a head *Kangani* was achieved in one of the following three ways: 1) A *Kangani* who regularly recruited laborers from India, 2) A man appointed as a head *Kangani* by the management or 3) a title passed down from father to son (Hollup, p. 29). Each group or gang of labor was under the control of a *Sillare Kangani* or a sub-*Kangani.* Each sub-*Kangani* reported to a head *Kangani* (Hollup, 1994, p. 29).

In order to pay for the cost of recruiting and transporting labor from India, each *Kangani* was advanced cash to pay for the expenses. This advanced payment was charged against him and the laborers as a debit in the accounting books of the plantation. Once the laborers started working on the plantation, the expense was deducted from their wages (Wesumperuma, p. 61).

The *Kangani* used different tactics to entice the Tamils in South India to work on the tea plantations in Sri Lanka. Nadesan (1993) notes that *Kanganies* painted a "rosy picture" of the money and better conditions on the plantations. The "honeyed words" words used by the *Kanganies* created great hopes among the poor peasants to better themselves and to get out of their existing inhuman conditions (Nedesan, pp. 22-23).

The rosy picture painted by the *Kanganies* was not just in words, it was done in some tangible ways also. For instance, a *Kangani* helped in paying the outstanding debts of the prospective laborers in India. In the process, the laborer became free to leave India for the plantations in Sri Lanka. The paying of the debt by the *Kangani* was not a gift, however. Just as they had to repay the transportation costs to the management, the laborers had to repay their Indian debts to the *Kangani* once they started working at the plantation (Nedesan).

In recruiting laborers generally a *Kangani* selected members first from his own caste and then from the lower castes which included "*Pallan*, *Paraiyan* and *Chakkiliyan*" (Jayaraman, 1975, p. 58). If a *Kangani* belonged to the Non-Brahman caste, he recruited both the Non-Brahman and the untouchable caste groups of laborers. However, if a *Kangani* belonged to one of the low caste, he recruited laborers from the low caste only.

The role of the *Kangani* was not just limited to the recruitment of the laborers from India. Once back on the plantations, *Kanganies* supervised laborers and served as intermediaries between planters and laborers. The *Kangani* enjoyed his dual role of a "labour contractor" for his British planters and as an "immediate employer" for the laborers, he recruited (Wesumperuma, 1986, p. 61).

The British planters also depended on *Kangani's* various talents and services. For instance, *Kanganies* spoke Tamil and knew the local customs as well as the people they recruited. *Kanganies* were attracted to their lucrative jobs. The cash advanced to them by the planters was used according to their wishes as they were able to retain most of it for their greater personal benefit (Wesumperuma, 1986, p. 62). The *Kanganies* misused the money that was given to cover en route traveling and food expenses and little attention was paid for the comfort and safety of the migrating labor on their way to Sri Lanka.

Once the labor was settled and started working on the plantations, "they were grouped into sub-gangs under the family head, called the sub-*Kangani* or *Sillare Kangani*" (Hollup, 1994, p. 29). Each *Sillare Kangani* with his gang of labor reported to a head *Kangani*. The composition of the sub gangs was based on caste and kinship categories. Depending upon the size of the plantation and the total labor force, there were two to three head *Kanganies* on each estate.

It is also important to note that the journey of the laborers from India to the plantations in Sri Lanka was often treacherous. One route by which the laborers came was by reaching Manar in the North and then walking 150 miles across an "arid country to reach Matale which was the northernmost point of the Ceylon Government Railway in

1880" (Wesumperuma, 1986 p. 43). From here, the laborers took trains to reach various plantations. Those who could not afford the train had to walk further to reach to their plantations.

The laborers were often infected with diseases before they even started their journey from India. While walking on the long route there were "frequent outbreaks of epidemics, cholera and smallpox in particular" (p. 44). This also affected the natives who lived in villages along the route. The long walk and sickness "left the immigrants exhausted and enfeebled on arrival at the estate" (Wesumperuma, 1986, p. 44).

In addition to the physical hardships, Velupillai (1970), a folk poet, describes other hardships, which highlight the dislocation of the laborers and loss of their mother land. He writes:

I lost my dear country
With it my palm grove
In this far famed Kandi
I lost my mother and home (p. 42).

Muralitharan (1995) compiled poems written by the laborers who worked on the early plantations. He narrates the following to show pain of leaving one's country.

Our village in India had enough rice
Here we also eat rice but we
do not think
they belong to us (p. 6).

The Present Plantation Sector in Sri Lanka

The present plantation sector in Sri Lanka includes three export crops: tea, rubber, and coconut. The coconut crop does not require resident labor. It is a peasant crop and most of the coconut plantations are small holdings of fifty acres each. Rubber plantations

are generally tea-cum-rubber plantations located near the Sinhalese villages. As such most of the labor for the rubber plantations comes from these villages (Hollup, 1994).

According to Hollup, most of Sri Lanka's tea plantations are located in the districts of Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Kandy, Kegalle, and Ratnapura (p. 11). The tea crop is grown on hilly areas in these districts and the altitude and the climate conditions contribute to different qualities of tea that is produced. Each quality has a different export market (p. 12).

Additionally, the Ministry of Housing Construction and Public Utilities (1996) provides useful information about the plantation and the people who work on them. It notes that the plantations are located in three areas of the country. They are known as up-country, mid-country, and low-country areas. The total resident population of the plantations is 1.5 million, which at the rate of 5 persons per family translates to around 300,000 families (pp. 3-4).

Manikam (1995) highlights the financial contribution of tea to the national economy and the number of jobs that the plantations provide. He notes that out of the 28 billion Sri Lankan rupees earned from the 1994 export of tea, rubber and coconut, tea alone contributed 21 billion rupees (p. 5). Additionally the "tea plantations provide direct employment for about 750,000 workers" (p. 5).

The plantation chosen for this study is located in the up-county area of Sri Lanka. For the purposes of this study, this plantation is called *Sooryan*[2]. A detailed discussion of how this plantation was chosen is given in chapter 3 and a complete description of the plantation and the laborers who work on it is provided in chapter 4.

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[2] *Sooryan* is a Tamil word which means sun in English.

In this section, I provided a description of Sri Lanka and its people, especially the plantation Tamil people among whom the study was conducted. The section traced the history of tea plantations and how labor was recruited under the *Kangani* system. It described various roles *Kanganies* played in recruiting the labor force from India and then supervising them at the plantations in Sri Lanka. The section concluded by providing information about the present plantations in the country and their contribution to the national economy of Sri Lanka.

The next section explores literature about plantation and non-plantation societies. First, I refer to several specific "contexts" which explain the global phenomena of the plantations and how these contexts are crucial in understanding the interpersonal conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan*. Secondly, I explore the work of Hall (1976) and Triandis (1995) who explain non-plantation societies.

Literature For Understanding Different Cultures

This section explores literature about the differences between plantation and non-plantation societies. In the first part, I describe several contexts under which the plantations were established globally. These contexts provide not only a historical overview but also connect to the interpersonal conflicts of the plantation community of *Sooryan*. This becomes clear in chapters 4 and 5 where the setting of the *Sooryan* plantation and the findings are presented, respectively. By context, I mean the political, economic and cultural factors unique to the creation of plantations.

Plantation Societies

Beckford (1983) stresses that a plantation society is different from other societies. He notes: "plantation society has properties which distinguish it clearly from, say, peasant society, feudal society, urban society and other such types. . .[therefore], it seems necessary to treat plantation society as a particular society" (p. 79). In order to understand plantation community as a "particular society" I present several contexts that will provide an overall view of the plantations with specific reference to Sri Lanka.

Social and Cultural Dislocation. The following contexts indicate how the Tamils from India lost their source of livelihood and their cultural and social practices of interpersonal conflict resolution.

1) Daniel (1993) asserts that while the Sri Lankan plantation community was accustomed to living off the land in India, the commercial nature of the plantations kept them from growing their own vegetables and cereals on the plantations. He explains that their labor to cultivate the land "did not directly yield their subsistence. This was due less to the unavailability of land for personal gardening and more to the fact that their labor had been leased for the sole purpose of growing tea" (p. 571).

This social context is crucial in understanding their dislocation. Even though the labor force is involved in cultivating the land, it does not produce its own food: "on plantations, production of the crop (crops) is undertaken solely for sale" (Beckford, 1983, p. 6). The community's basic and crucial socialization to the land was lost through the introduction of plantation work.

2) Another important context of particular significance to this study involves the evolution of interpersonal conflict resolution practices of the plantation laborers recruited

to work in Sri Lanka. Their indigenous conflict resolution practice was carried out by *Panchayats* in their native village communities in India. A *Panchayat* is a "meeting, council, or court of five or more members of a village who assemble to judge disputes or determine group policy" (Meschievitz & Galanter (1982, p. 48). Jayaraman (1975) explains this village practice of the laborers:

> In almost all the Non-Brahman and Untouchable castes, caste disputes were settled by *panchayats*. Normally, each endogamous sub-division of the caste in each village had its *periya tanakkaran* (headman) and his assistant *kariystan* (secretary). A number of castes had in addition a *panchayat* with jurisdiction over each *padu* or group of villages. Again, normally, those disputes not decided within a caste were referred to the village *panchayat* or to the disputants' landlords (p. 52).

Once the laborers started working on the plantations, the village practice of *panchayat* was taken over by the head *Kangani* (Hkg) in the early period of the plantations in Sri Lanka. In addition to recruiting and supervising the labor, a (Hkg) also listened to the laborers' problems and resolved their interpersonal conflicts. Thus, he replaced the laborers' cultural customs related to conflict resolution practices to which they had been socialized in India.

To illustrate this, Hollup (1994) narrates the words of a head *Kangani*:

> If there were quarrels and problems they (the labourers) would report to me (Hkg.). Disputes were not reported to the police or the manager, but used to be solved among us. In those days, the Hkgs solved all types of family problems, disputes and fights. If they could not come to any solution, then only the Hkg went to the manager (*Dorai*) to report the case (pp. 29-30).

This phenomena is also explained by Jayaraman (1975) who states, "The head *Kanganies* looked after the welfare of the labourers, and were generally called upon also to settle family disputes" (p. 60).

The above examples indicate how the plantation community lost control over their lives. This evolution of loss continues, as we will see in the chapter outlining the present interpersonal conflict resolution practices at *Sooryan*.

Ethnic & Racial Divisions. These contexts affected the ways, the creation of plantations resulted in multiethnic societies initially controlled by white planters.

1) This context concerns the ways plantation labor changed the ethnic make-up of the countries where plantations were established. Beckford (1983) states that in almost all cases around the world the establishment of plantations resulted in multiethnic groups. He adds: "Cultural plurality is a characteristic feature of all plantation societies because the plantations brought together people of different races and cultural backgrounds to carry out the task of production" (p. 56).

The cultural plurality existed and still exists on the plantations and in the society at large in Sri Lanka. For instance, the early planters were white, the Sinhalese were middle managers, and the Tamils were on the bottom as laborers. In today's Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese have replaced the white owners and managers, the middle management is a mixture of Jaffna Tamils, Sinhalese, and Indian Tamils and the laborers are mostly Tamils who are descendants of laborers recruited from India (Hollup, 1994).

2) In addition to creating a culturally plural society, the plantations were also based on race, caste, and class (Beckford, 1983). He explains that the laborers belonged to a lower caste and class unlike their owners who were all white. Beckford (1983) writes: "In every instance, the system was introduced by the white Europeans who had to rely on non-white labor for working the plantations. Race therefore was a convenient means of controlling the labor supply" (p.67).

In Sri Lanka, the race of the owners and managers has been replaced by the high castes and high class Sinhalese from Kandy and Colombo (Hollup, 1994). It is clear that in establishing plantations the owners had no vision or romantic aim to create cultural plurality in plantation societies. Rather it was a means of controlling a low caste labor group.

Political & Social Control. The following political context shows how the owners gained political power through the plantations. As a result, the laborers lost their capacity to organize on their own.

The lack of social organizations on plantations in Sri Lanka today can be attributed to the immense political power of the plantations. Again Beckford (1983) provides a global view and argues that a plantation is a political entity. An individual planter has control over all the groups who work on it. This control is maximized when a plantation joins several others in a region in the country. The planters can exercise this power in a region by administering the "political affairs of the region" (p. 75). In this way, the planters can influence the local political administration to their advantage and therefore the "state power becomes concentrated in the hands of the planters who already have authority and control on their individual plantations" (p. 75).

During this research, I experienced first hand the power wielded by the plantation managers. In one incident, when I was in the process of introducing and getting permission for my study, a manager of a plantation called the police. As a result, my research assistant and I were taken to the police station. We were kept there for three hours, even though we had all the papers which the manager and the police indicated I must possess to undertake this research study.

This immense political power of plantations makes any social organization among the labor virtually impossible. Beckford (1983) notes that within a "plantation society, economic and social power is concentrated among a small class and that, outside of the master's house, social organization within the plantation community tends to be poorly developed" (p. 76).

I assume that a group's ability to organize on their own is crucial for understanding its social and cultural practices of interpersonal conflict resolution practices. The lack of organizing among the laborers of *Sooryan* is discussed in the last chapter of this study.

Plantation Bureaucracy. This context helps us understand the nature of the plantation's organizational bureaucracy. It also provides some insights to the ways an interpersonal conflict may be dealt with on a plantation.

A plantation society can be classified as what Morrill (1995) calls a "mechanistic bureaucracy" (p. 46). In such a bureaucracy the "institutionalized structures of authority constitute the core of such arrangements within which managers adhere to the prerogatives of superiors as defined by formal chain of command..."(p. 46). Other features of such bureaucracies include; 1) a structure in which subordinates are never consulted about the performance of their boss, 2) promotions which are determined solely by the supervisors, and 3) subordinates who refer to their superiors as "boss" or as "slave driver" and the mangers who refer to their subordinates as "my gang" (p. 48).

Of a particular significance to this study is how mechanistic bureaucracies manage conflicts. Morrill (1995) writes that such organizations when managing conflicts at work use "downward actions" in which authoritative commands are used and consist of

"directives to subordinates to alter some aspect of their behavior immediately and without question" (p. 107).

The above features of a mechanistic bureaucracy present in the *Sooryan* plantation are presented in chapter 4 and also discussed in the analysis which is presented in chapter 6.

Citizenship Rights. This context alludes to the difficulties the plantation community has lived over the years in Sri Lanka and how this contributes to the present day conflicts of the labor at *Sooryan.*

This context under which the plantation Tamils live is connected with their citizenship rights in Sri Lanka. The Indian plantation Tamil community has long lived under the uncertainty of being stateless citizens of Sri Lanka. Here, my aim is not to exhaust the whole history of various events and legislations aimed at solving the citizenship rights of the plantation Tamils as it is lengthy and complicated. Rather, I want to briefly show how this uncertainty surrounding citizenship rights renders them peripheral in the larger society today and contributes towards the interpersonal conflicts of the labor at *Sooryan.*

Law and Society Trust (1996), a human rights organization in Sri Lanka, explains that "the citizenship laws were so rigid that few Up Country Tamils, especially the plantation workers, could qualify for the citizenship" (p. 132). Over the years, several pacts have been agreed upon and signed between the governments of India and Sri Lanka. The general nature of these pacts has included agreeing on number of laborers to be repatriated back to India and their citizenship rights. The complexity related to the issue of citizenship rights is evident from a pact between the two governments which was

agreed upon but not implemented. The Law and Society Trust (1996) notes, "For variety of reasons, the Sirima-Shastri Pact [of 1964] was not implemented as planned" (p. 132).

The more recent legislation of 1988 "entitled any stateless person of Indian origin who had not applied for Indian citizenship and who was lawfully resident in Sri Lanka to obtain a Certificate of Citizenship" (p. 132). However, this act is contradictory as it states that nobody is required to produce a Certificate of Citizenship. The legislation states that only a sworn affidavit stating that a person is a citizen would suffice unless some one challenges the affidavit (Law and Society Trust).

The Law and Society Trust notes that even though the issue of nationality has been solved legally in Sri Lanka, the plantation Tamils still "contend that the disabilities which they were subjected to in their every daily life while stateless, especially in their dealings with the government, still linger on" (p. 133). For example, when a job is announced for a public service, it requires that a person prove his/her citizenship by descent or registration, even though the constitution of 1978 did away with this requirement.

In summary, the above contexts describe the unique position of the Tamils on the plantation and in the Sri Lankan society at large. How these contexts contribute to the interpersonal conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan* are explored in later chapters.

Non-Plantation Societies

In this part, I present literature to understand non-plantation societies. Hall (1976) describes the high-context and low-context traits of cultures and Triandis (1995) explains features of individualism and collectivism in societies. Both Hall and Triandis make

specific references to the socialization of people towards interpersonal conflict and how they seek its resolution.

High-Context and Low-Context. A context can be built around communication, orientation to time, and many other cultural constructs with which we relate to others in a given culture. Hall (1976) provides a basis for studying cultural contexts:

> One of the functions of culture is to provide a highly selective screen between [people] and the outside world. In its many forms, culture therefore designates what we pay attention to and what we ignore (p. 85).

In our attempts to attend to or ignore people, issues, and situations, we are guided by the cultural context in which we live and/or are socialized. Why is it important to understand different cultures in their context? A context gives us clues about a culture which is described by Hall (1976): "Culture is [wo]man's medium: there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture" (p. 16).

Hall (1976), for example, divides communication patterns in cultures into "high-context" and "low-context". According to Hall:

> a high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code (p. 91, my emphasis added).

By code, he refers to the actual language, which is used to communicate. In other words, in a high-context message, the content of the information is assumed to be present in the physical environment or it is possessed by the person/s who are communicating the information. In low-context communication on the other hand, the information has to be explained in the "code", or language, and nothing is assumed from the physical context or the information the person/s may already have. Hall (1976) gives examples of the kinds

of communication that take place in these two contexts. One example of high-context communication is that of twins who have grown up together. They are able to communicate with very little explicit effort because of their growing up together and knowing each other over the years. On the other hand, a lawyer in the United States will communicate in court in a low-context manner, giving very detailed verbal and graphic information (p. 91). Thus, one's socialization in a given context will influence factors in conflict resolution such as negotiation and communication styles.

Duryea (1992) elaborates further on Hall's thesis of low and high contexts and helps locate various cultures on the basis of these contexts. She writes:

> Low-context cultures generally refer to groups characterized by individualism, overt communication, and heterogeneity. The United States, Canada, and Central and Northern Europe are described as areas where low-context cultural practices are most in evidence. High-context cultures feature collective identity-focus, covert communication, and homogeneity. This approach prevails in Asian countries including Japan, China, and Korea as well as Latin American countries [and Africa] (p. 39, my emphasis added).

Since Hall's (1976) definition is used to describe communication within any group or community, the prevalence of either high- or low-context communication is not limited to specific geographical regions. Within a low-context culture, one can find a high-context sub-culture or individuals and vice-versa. For example, in New York City the South Asian community runs lively fruit and clothes markets in Queens, and a street in "Spanish Harlem" could as easily be found in the Dominican Republic. Both of these examples are of high-context cultures living and interacting within an overall low-context culture. Conversely, in Pakistan, an office of an U.S. business or an U.S. Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) with its American staff will operate generally as low-context enclaves in an overall high-context society.

Another aspect of high- and low-contexts is the nature of expectations people require from each other. Hall notes that "people raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems" (p. 113). This socialization to expectations in a given context has important significance for how people would see the role of the mediator in an interpersonal conflict. In addition to expectations, one's orientation to time and negotiation style is also significant for the resolution of an interpersonal conflict.

One's orientation to time is important to the field of conflict resolution. People have a different sense of timing in the conflict resolution process based on whether they are from a high-context or low-context culture. This may manifest itself in several ways, including the concept of punctuality in a given culture or the sense of timing when intervening or resolving a conflict. Cohen (1991) notes the importance of time to conflict resolution by asking, "How do [people] perceive time - as a road stretching off purposefully into the future, or as an ocean lapping in on all sides, directionless? When do [people] consider a dispute ripe for resolution?" (p. 27). In the West, according to Siemens (1996), "we tend to work towards resolution quickly, thinking that the conflict will only get worse if left unattended" (p. 8), whereas people from high-context cultures tend to have "a subtle sense of the timing involved in the conflict, and of the time that needs to pass before reconciliation can occur." For example, in Thailand "this sense of timing relates to patience, highly valued in Thai culture" (Siemens, p. 8).

Hall (1976) writes, "American time is what I have termed 'monochronic'; that is, Americans, when they are serious, usually prefer to do one thing at a time, and this requires some kind of scheduling, either implicit or explicit" (p. 17). On the other hand,

some cultures use what Hall (1976) calls "polychronic time." An orientation to this time is characterized by doing "several things at once" or doing things as they come up (p. 17).

Another important consideration is that of negotiation styles among low- and high-context cultures. In describing the work of a Japanese political scientist, Mushakoji Kinhide, Cohen (1991) notes "that the basic incompatibility between American and Japanese negotiators derives from a fundamental philosophical difference in views about the relationship between humans and their environment" (cited in Cohen, 1991, p. 30). Kinhide calls the American style of negotiation *erabi*, meaning "manipulative, can-do, or choosing style" (p. 30). This *erabi* style of the negotiator fails to "cultivate personal relationships or [adapt] to special circumstances. Choices are 'either-or' and are made on the basis of instrumental or ends-means criteria alone" (p. 31). In the Japanese *awase* (adaptive) style of negotiation, "social realities and concrete circumstances loom large. Negotiation is not an end in itself, to be treated in isolation, but simply one episode in an ongoing relationship" (p. 31).

I find Hall's work extremely important in understanding societies, which are multi-ethnic and people who are socialized in different contexts. It is significant for educators and practitioners of interpersonal conflict resolution field in designing effective programs for a wider understanding and participation. In the following section, I will examine another body of literature, which helps usunderstand a non-plantation society. For this, I will review literature related to individualism and collectivism.

Individualism and Collectivism. In his work, Triandis (1995) provides a useful lens with which to understand different cultures. He describes two different cultural dimensions: collectivism and individualism.

The term Collectivism is defined as:

> A social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as part of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation); are primarily motivated by the norm of, and duties imposed by, those collectives; are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals; and emphasize their connectedness to members of these collectives (p. 2).

He goes on to define individualism as:

> A social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives; are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others; give priority to their personal goals over the goals of others; and emphasize rational analyses of the advantages and disadvantages of associating with others (p. 2).

As a particular significance to this study, it is important to explore different ways in which people in individualist and collectivist societies seek help. According to Triandis, a person from an individualist culture is more likely to act on his/her own behalf in the conflict resolution process and tends to rely on professionals for help and advice. A person from a collectivist culture acts on behalf of family and friends in the process and the resolution of conflict and generally turns to a third party, such as relatives and work supervisors.

As in low- and high-context cultures, the distinction between Triandis' (1995) constructs is not always clear cut. One can find an individualist in a collectivist situation and vice versa. In general, the countries of North America and Europe are primarily individualist, while the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America can be classified as collectivist. Some exceptions would include refugees and recent immigrants in North America and Europe who are in the collectivist category, while western development workers working overseas are primarily individualist.

In the next part, I present conflict resolution models which manifest characteristics of high-context and low-context cultures and individualism and collectivism. First, I briefly trace the history of mediation among different cultures and in different religions. Secondly, I provide background of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and the practice of mediation in the United States. Thirdly, I explain several interpersonal conflict resolution models, which manifest high-context and collectivist traits. They include the Korean-American Harmony model, the Pakistani *Jirga* and *Panchayat* models, and the Hawaiian *Ho'oponopono* model. Finally, I synthesize conflict resolution models practiced in high-context and collectivist societies and present a typology of the literature reviewed.

Third Party Conflict Resolution Models

Cultural and Historical Roots of Mediation

Folberg and Taylor (1984) underscore the historical and cultural roots of mediation:

> Mediation as an alternative to self-help or formal legal procedures is not entirely new. Forms of conflict resolution in which a third party helps disputants resolve their conflicts and come to their own decisions have probably been practiced since the existence of three or more people on earth (p. 1).

In ancient China, the Confucian value of preserving natural harmony was the basis for a form of mediation using moral persuasion to resolve conflicts. Mediation is still practiced widely today in China through People's Conciliation Committees and the formal law accords great importance to self determination in the resolution of all disputes (Brown, 1982 & Ginsberg, 1978, cited in Folberg & Taylor, 1984, pp. 1-2). Japanese society, which has a longstanding tradition of conciliation and mediation, is noted for

having more flower arrangers than attorneys (Vroom, Fossett, & Wakefield, 1981, cited in Folberg and Taylor, 1984, p. 2).

In certain parts of Africa, a neighborhood meeting or assembly called *moot* is used to resolve interpersonal conflict. *Moot* utilizes the skills and respect of a notable elder or a "big man" to mediate the conflict (Folberg & Taylor, 1984, p. 2). In the North-West Frontier and Balochistan provinces of Pakistan and in parts of Afghanistan, *Jirga*, an assembly of male elders, decides on various conflicts among the Pukhtun and Baloch ethnic groups (Ahmed, 1980, p. 90).

The importance and use of mediation is also found in the Bible. St. Paul in the New Testament tells Corinthians not to take their disputes to the court but rather to appoint people of their own community to settle disputes among themselves (Folberg and Taylor, 1984, p. 3). Jesus Christ is referred to as a mediator between God and man. Moore (1986) gives a reference from the Bible: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5-6, p. 19).
The Catholic Church and Jewish rabbinical courts used mediation among their parishioners in Europe. Moore (1986) writes:

> Until the Renaissance, the Catholic Church in Western Europe was probably the central mediation and conflict management organization in Western society...Jewish rabbinical courts and rabbis in Europe were vital in mediating or adjudicating disputes among members of that faith (pp. 19-20).

The followers of Islam are instructed to set matters right among themselves. Al-Qardawi (1991) quotes a *Hadith* (sayings of prophet Mohammed), "It is putting things right between people, for to incite people to dispute is like a razor. And I do not mean that it shaves off the hair but that it shears the religion" (p. 311).

In next section, I briefly trace the history of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) movement, which gave birth to the mediation model practiced in the United States.

Mediation & the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Movement in the United States

The 1960s were an era of profound social upheaval and re-assessment in the United States. The women's liberation movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, and the civil rights movement were only a few of the struggles against the dominant structures and institutions. There was a strong and vocal population, which believed in structural change and saw the accompanying conflict as positive, necessary, and good (Scimecca, 1991, p. 21).

The judicial system was one of the institutions that came under constant attack. Lawyers were perceived as perpetuating a legal system that produced unequal justice (Scimecca, p. 20). Courts were overcrowded, procedures were complex, costs were high, there were long delays in receiving due process, and the outcomes were "dubious" (Singer, 1990, p. 3). The criticism of the court system in this country mounted over time. According to Merry (1982):

> American courts are notorious for their failure to resolve minor, interpersonal disputes quickly, effectively, and in a way that satisfies the disputing parties. The increasing urbanism, transiency, and heterogeneity of American society in the twentieth century has undermined informal dispute settlement mechanisms rooted in the home, church, and community and increased the demand for other means of dealing with family, neighbor, and community disputes (p. 17).

The various social movements of the 1960s and the general criticism of the mainstream justice system in the United States contributed to the development of alternative dispute resolution systems. Scimecca (1991) traces the early history of ADR in the United States:

> A major official impetus for the growth of ADR was a 1976 American Bar Association-sponsored National Conference on the Causes of Popular Dissatisfaction with Administration of Justice. The conference concluded that alternative forms of dispute resolution, in particular mediation and arbitration, would ease congested courts, reduce settlement time, and minimize costs. The development of 'neighborhood justice centers' (which practiced mediation) and multidoor court house programs (which directed disputants to the most appropriate dispute resolving mechanism: litigation, mediation, or arbitration) were encouraged (p. 30).

This political and social activism coupled with sharp criticism of the formal justice system gave birth to mediation under ADR. The first attempt at mediation nationally was in 1978 with federally funded Neighborhood Justice Centers (NJCs) located in cities across the United States. The goal of the NJCs was to "provide free or low-cost mediation services to the public to resolve disputes efficiently, inexpensively, and informally" (Moore, 1986, p. 22). Since then, mediation has continued to grow and is now used to resolve conflicts in a variety of arenas including organized labor, schools and communities, as well as among couples, neighbors and others.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) prescribes different types of interventions. Duryea (1992) lists those interventions, which are commonly used: negotiation, conciliation, mediation, arbitration, and adjudication (p. 5). She notes that the most common intervention used in community-based dispute resolution is mediation (p. 5). For the purposes of this dissertation, I will focus on mediation which is practiced through Neighborhood Justice Centers (NJCs) in urban areas of the United States. First, I define other interventions.

The term Negotiation is defined as:

> a bargaining relationship between parties who have a perceived or actual conflict of interest. The participants voluntarily join in a temporary relationship designed to educate each other about their needs and interests, to exchange specific

resources, or to resolve one or more intangible issues such as the form their relationship will take in the future or the procedure by which problems are to be solved (Moore, 1986, p. 6).

The process of Conciliation involves disputants, who informally try to resolve their differences among themselves. Arbitration is defined as a "voluntary process in which people in conflict request the assistance of an impartial and a neutral third party to make a decision for them regarding the contested issues" (Moore, 1986, p. 7).

Moore defines adjudication as a process which

> [i]nvolves the intervention of an institutionalized and socially recognized authority into private dispute resolution...the disputants hire lawyers to act as surrogate disputants to argue their respective cases before an impartial and a neutral third party, a judge and perhaps a jury as well (pp. 7-8).

Folberg and Taylor (1984) define Mediation as:

> the process by which the participants, together with the assistance of a neutral person or persons, systematically isolate disputed issues in order to develop options, consider alternatives, and reach a consensual settlement that will accommodate their needs. Mediation is a process that emphasizes the participants' own responsibility for making decisions that affect their lives. It is therefore a self-empowering process (pp. 7-8).

How does the mediation process work in the United States? Moore (1996) provides 12 stages of this mediation process. Here, I summarize these stages:

> Stage 1: Establish a Relationship with the Disputing Parties. The stage consists of making initial contacts with the disputing parties, building rapport and educating them about the mediation process.
>
> Stage 2: Selecting a Strategy to Guide Mediation. The mediator helps the disputants to various approaches they can take in resolving their conflict. He assists them in selecting one and then coordinates with the disputants.
>
> Stage 3: Collecting and Analyzing Background Information. In this stage, the mediator collects pertinent information about the people and the actual conflict. The information is verified before designing a plan for the mediation.

Stage 4: Designing a Detailed Plan for Mediation. The mediator identifies "strategies and consequent noncontingent moves that will enable the parties to move toward agreement" (p. 66).

Stage 5: Building Trust and Cooperation. In the stage the mediator helps build the trust between the parties and prepares them psychologically to "participate in negotiations on substantive issues" (p. 66). The mediator ensures that both the parties recognize the legitimacy of each other's issues and helps with the communication.

Stage 6: Beginning the Mediation Session. Here the mediator "opens negotiation between the parties" (p. 66). He/she sets the stage by establishing an open and positive environment for the parties. The mediator establishes ground rules and helps them in venting emotions and assists them in exploring commitments.

Stage 7: Defining Issues and Setting an Agenda. In this stage, the mediator identifies broad topic areas of concern to the disputing parties. The mediator obtains an agreement on which issues are to be discussed and determines a sequence for handling these issues.

Stage 8: Uncovering the Hidden Interests of the Disputing Parties. The mediator identifies "substantive, procedural, and psychological interests of the parties" (p. 67). In addition, in this stage the parties are educated about each other's interests.

Stage 9: Generating Options for Settlement. In this stage, the mediator makes the parties aware of the need for multiple options. The parties are discouraged from having sole alternatives for the resolution of their conflict.

Stage 10: Assessing Options for Settlement. The mediator reviews the interests of both parties and assesses how "interests can be met by available options" (p. 67). The mediator also assesses the costs and benefits of selecting options.

Stage 11: Final Bargaining. In this stage the parties reach an agreement through either "incremental convergence of positions, ... or establishment of procedural means to reach a substantive agreement" (p. 67).

Stage 12: Achieving Formal Settlement. The mediator identifies procedural steps to operationalize the agreement" (p. 67). Also, an evaluation and monitoring procedure is established and the settlement is formalized and an enforcement and commitment mechanism is created.

The above twelve stages are divided into two broad categories: 1) The first five stages of the mediation process are activities, which the mediator must perform before a

mediation begins. 2) The remaining seven stages include activities "initiated once the mediator has entered into formal problem solving with the parties..."(Moore, 1996, p. 64).

Lederach (1986) provides insight into the cultural assumptions of the North American mediation model, which he calls the "Gringo model." Before describing these assumptions, he reflects on his work in Central America as a mediation trainer attempting to make the training relevant to the people of Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. He recalls a common reaction of the participants to his ideas: "That sounds like a good idea, but it feels gringo (Yankee) to us" (p. 23). His critique is based on the monologue which he defines as "the formal introduction that sets up what is going to happen in mediation" (p. 23). These cultural assumptions are summarized as follows:

1. Lederach (1986)points out that mediation is formalized in North America. The setting in which the mediation takes place is outside the territory of the disputant. It takes place in a public setting, which is bureaucratic. He notes, "It takes place indoors and has many time constraints" (p. 23).

2. "We assume that face-to-face communication is the best way to resolve conflict" (p. 23). He refers to this kind of communication as "social control of direct communication" (p. 23). This control is gained by setting up rules about how the disputants and the mediator(s) are going to talk.

3. Lederach (1986) notes that in North American mediation, communication is direct and usually fast-paced. The aim of this communication is to disclose oneself and express one's concerns. Lederach notes, "Our time is oriented towards analytical kinds of things over relational" (p. 24). The use of time and style of communication here are clear examples of mediation taking place in a low-context culture (Hall, 1976).

In light of Lederach's work, I want to present a personal story, which will further depict this mediation model. In January 1996, I had the opportunity to go through a mediation in the Small Claims Court of Northampton, Massachusetts for a dispute I had with a U.S. airline. After the airline denied my claim presented in a letter, I decided to take the case to court. On the hearing date, the judge gave me and the lawyer representing the airline these three options: 1) Talk between yourselves and try to reach an agreement; 2) If that does not work, then go through court-mandated mediation; and 3) Failing both of those, you can present your case before the judge. The lawyer refused to go through step #1, so we went to step #2, mediation.

Before the mediation, I met the mediator privately and asked her a few questions about the mediation process. The mediator told me that each side would be given an opportunity to present their case. She told me that her job was to remain neutral and that she would try to facilitate a resolution of our dispute. She also informed me that she worked on a volunteer basis in the court. In the mediation session, with a quick introduction of herself, she started the mediation process. The lawyer did not want to mediate, so the session ended in less than four minutes.

Although the session was too brief to base an assessment of this model, I walked away with some analysis and questions. We walked into the mediation session as adversaries and left the session as adversaries. It was done in a business-like manner. She first asked him and then me "What is the problem?" Upon his refusal to go through mediation, no attempt was made to explore his reasons. As many clients were waiting outside she seemed rushed and, from the outset, told us she would finish the mediation

process as soon as possible without consulting with either one of us. I left with these questions and thoughts in my mind:

> * What if one or both of us did not speak English? The mediator at no stage asked if both of us understood English.
> * The mediation was done on the court premises, in a legal environment.
> * Did both of us walk into the mediation session having equal power? Why did the lawyer insist on going before a judge and refuse to mediate?

I understand this procedure can in no way represent the variety of experiences at community centers across the United States and I cannot make a sweeping generalization based on my one brief experience of mediation. However, there are some important cultural considerations related to the setting and style of a typical ADR mediation session.

The literature helps in understanding the general environment under which conflict resolution procedures of mediation take place. LeResche (1990) points out that such procedures are imbedded in the American culture and are managed like a business across the United States. She explains:

> Consumers (the parties in the conflict) are urged to 'buy into the process' which is one which should result in an agreement or contract, for which forms are provided. The process is ready-made. Consumers are helped to identify optional solutions and choose the one that best fits their needs. They go through the procedure in assembly-line fashion. The manager of this production is the mediator (p. 78).

I certainly went through this assembly-line like procedure. I found the process low-context, in which procedures were explained in a step-by-step fashion, and time was tightly managed. Since others were waiting outside to go through the mediation, the mediator rushed us through as if she was filling up Coca-Cola bottles.

Next, I will present a conflict resolution model, which is practiced among Korean-Americans in the United States. I chose this model as it represents a high-context society in an overall low-context environment in the United States.

Korean-American Perception of Interpersonal Conflict and its Resolution through the Harmony Model

From a different cultural base, LeResche (1990) examines the perception and resolution of interpersonal conflict by Korean-Americans in the United States. This ethnic group was chosen to illustrate a conflict resolution model, which is practiced among a non-Anglo immigrant group in the United States. LeResche's (1990) work provides a rich background on how Korean-Americans perceive interpersonal conflict, the importance they place in knowing the helper (third party), the age and gender of this helper and various ways in which they manage these conflicts in the United States. Although in her study all references to this 'intermediary' are as 'he', she notes that both men and women can act as intermediary. The interviewees in the study referred to the intermediary as a "he".

Using LeResche's (1990) study, I will provide a brief overview of Korean-American culture, including their arrival in this country, their religious beliefs, the urban geographic areas where they live, and some of their social customs. This overview places them in Hall's (1976) high-context and Triandis' (1995) collectivist culture. These frameworks will become clear as the reader understands their culture and the process used in their conflict resolution model.

LeResche, (1990) notes that the first 100 Koreans who arrived in the United States came to Hawaii in 1903 (Hurh and Kim, 1984, cited in LeResche, 1990, p. 130). In 1988, it was estimated that there were close to one million Korean-Americans in the

country (Minn, 1988, p. 1, cited in LeResche, 1990, p. 130). Out of this number, two-thirds arrived after the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act. Since 1965, some 30,000 Koreans have been coming to this country annually. Today, Korean-Americans have sizable communities in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Philadelphia (p. 131).

Korean-Americans, according to Hurh and Kim (1984), maintain a very strong attachment to their native land and an intense pride in their cultural heritage. LeResche (1990) refers to the results of Hurh and Kim's (1984) studies:

> Koreans in America tend to retain strong ethnic attachments to their native country, an intense pride in their heritage, and actively maintain intimate social ties with their family and fellow school alumni...More than sixty percent disapproved of intermarriages with other ethnic groups (p. 132).

LeResche (1990) explains the presence of various religions in Korea and current religious practices among Korean-Americans. She writes:

> Korea's historic ties with other nations have resulted in a deep-rooted pluralism in religion. Animism dominated Korean life from the earliest times and can still be found in Korea and in some Korean communities in America. Buddhism and Confucianism came to Korea primarily through China. Since the late 1800's, American Christian missionaries have had an influence on the Korean culture (p. 135).

LeResche (1990) notes that "[t]he extensive prevailing impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relations and communication patterns within Korea...became evident in how the Korean-Americans interviewed in this study view interpersonal conflicts and ways to respond to them" (p. 136). She explains these Confucian beliefs:

> Confucian teachings which surfaced during interviews in this study include: An emphasis on reciprocity ('*shu*') and proper attitudes to be exhibited, especially within five basic complementary social relationships: 1) loyalty between the ruler and ruled (in a highly stratified hierarchical system) 2) closeness or intimacy between father and son (and filial piety, '*hyodo*,' the ultimate source of all virtues), 3) duty between husband and wife (in a patriarchal system), 4) obedience and

respect between elders and those who are younger, and 5) mutual faith and trust between friends (pp. 136-137).

In her interviews with 25 Korean-Americans, LeResche (1990) found interpersonal conflict to primarily occur among different generations and members of Korean voluntary associations, and between husband and wife, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, church elders and deacons; or comprising financial or property debts between acquaintances and competition between small businesses (p. 150). Korean-Americans view conflicts as situations, which disrupt a harmony central to Koreans of all faiths, known as *Hwa* (p. 146).

What is the harmony model which is practiced among Korean- Americans in the United States? "The Korean-American Harmony Restoration Profile" emerges from LeResche's (1990) interviews (pp. 168-216) and consists of six stages:

1. Choosing a Respected Person: Those who were interviewed in this study said, "that a Korean-American uses the assistance of a third party if one is unable in any way to be more patient, cope with the situation...and if the amount of what is lost (in terms of pride, money) is considered to be enormous" (p. 169). The person who serves as an intermediary "should be invited to help with the conflict" (p. 171). In Korea, a person who is wise and respected, such as a teacher, is sought as an intermediary. In America, the intermediary "also needs to be a respectable person, in terms of age, gender, social status, and experience" (p. 174). LeResche (1990) describes several roles of the intermediary. "The intermediary performs a variety of roles and duties. At different stages, this person may be a fact finder, thinker, educator, philosopher, diplomat, advisor, go-between, planner, social coordinator, or advocate" (pp. 202-203).

2. Knowing about Relationship and Proper Conduct: This process of assisting persons in the conflict to restore their harmony begins with careful preparation to establish the following relevant points:

> 1) the relationship between the immediate persons in the conflict, the past and potential future relationships between themselves and their familial and social networks; 2) particulars about the ages, gender, and the characters of all concerned; the status of the pertinent individuals and institutions; 3) what the sages have said about what proper conduct is conducive to harmonious living; 4) stories of similar situations and how they were handled; and 5) the nature of the conflict (p. 175).

LeResche (1990) notes that the first two, the relationship and characteristics of those involved "are considered to be the most vital factors" while the particulars regarding the conflict itself are "the least relevant" (p. 175). She further elaborates:

> The focus in gathering information is on the personal characteristics of the conflicting persons and their social context. The goal of collecting this is for the intermediary to be able to generate recommended solutions to the conflict, by determining what is to be expected and feasible for each of them in their life circumstances (p. 176).

In order to determine the past relationships and their desire to build the nature of future relationships, the following three factors are important. They are:

> Family (genealogical relationship of one's clan or family name), 2) geographical area where one has lived (hometown) and 3) school(s) alumni and classmates. People are accustomed to using each of these three for making connections, getting jobs, loans, and other life tasks, when dealing with other Koreans...This is still true for most Koreans in America (p. 177).

The intermediary "needs to know who has the highest status, which can be more important than the age [because] the person with the most status is the one who has to be pleased, pacified, and accommodated" even, according to one interviewee, "if you do not agree with him" (p. 177).

3. Contemplation and Planning: Once the information and ideas have been gathered, the intermediary must spend silent time alone to reflect on and contemplate the case. This has a spiritual dimension and is used to find a precedent. In the first, reflection comes by contemplating on "what the words of the sages have been (especially Buddha, Confucius, and Jesus), perhaps [by] reading or reviewing their writings" (p. 183). The latter is achieved by:

> [thinking] of his own personal experiences and of related conflict experiences which he has heard about over the course of his lifetime. He thinks about the proper norms of behavior for each of the persons who are in the center of this type of conflict. All of this he then uses to construct a strategy for approaching each person with a suggested way that they should think of the situation, what behaviors and attitudes they should each assume, and an actual solution he recommends (p. 183).

After the intermediary has spent silent time alone, a solution is suggested. LeResche (1990) notes "[f]inding solutions to suggest is easier when the intermediary is familiar with the people and their social context" (p. 184). A good solution has the following components:

> A carefully crafted solution is one in which there is some thing for each person to do, and reasons why the person should do so. The proposals are formulated with reminders of one's responsibilities to his/her affinity groups and, sometimes, to the Korean society in America. This is an oral draft, a starting point to be presented by the intermediary to each person for their consideration. It is what he will use to persuade them to compromise, adapt, and be reconciled (p. 186).

4. Go-between Suggests and Advises: The intermediary starts his role of go-between by holding several meetings individually with the persons central to the conflict. Sometimes the intermediary will also visit those people who have influence on the persons in the conflict. The meetings take place in informal locations such as the back of a store, at a bar, at a place of work, or on a walk at specified or unspecified times. Once the meetings have taken place, the go-between persuades each person to consider the

other's circumstances. Here, the go-between gives advice and reminds those involved of their obligation to their families and their group affiliations.

Go-betweens can also apply pressure on the parties in the conflict. Often pressure takes the form of "moral persuasion which may emphasize guilt for hurting members of one's group if one does not find a way to bring about a peaceful relationship again" (p. 190).

The go-between may tell some stories from the past in which people who did not compromise suffered serious consequences as a result of their stubbornness. Some of the responses by the interviewees in LeResche's study indicate the consequences of not compromising. "Losing a friend is a crime" and "Loyalty is important, friends lasts forever" (p. 190).

After the go-between has listened to each party, applied moral persuasion and has reminded them of the consequences of not compromising, he may suggest a solution and "sometimes the suggested solution is readily accepted" (p. 193). LeResche (1990) notes:

> Acceptance may depend on how reasonable [the solution] appears to be from their perspective, or on the amount of prestige the third party has with the family or group of concern. In addition, participants said that because the go-between is using so much diplomacy and so much preparation, it is highly probable, that after much discussion and persuasion (as well as consultation with their respective groups) there will be an understanding between the persons in conflict (pp. 193-194).

5. Having an Understanding: "When enough moral and social pressure has been brought upon the persons in conflict to cause them to modify their positions and to compromise or accommodate in tolerable ways, they 'feel that they have an understanding'" (p. 194). LeResche (1990) notes:

> A successful understanding is one in which all persons feel right (each person's *Kibun* is good), the face of each person is preserved, little bitterness remains, and it is all according to *li* ('that which is reasonable and of propriety') (p. 194).

One important way the understanding between the parties is reached is through an apology. "Apologizing carries so much weight it is not only necessary, it is sometimes sufficient for an understanding" (p. 195). The emphasis is placed on reaching an understanding, which is "sincere." The efforts of the go-between are not only appreciated, but also trusted by the parties. "There is trust that what the go-between says is credible and has been based on each person's final good faith statements to him" (pp. 194-195). According to one interviewee in the study, therefore, "you don't ask someone to sign anything or write it down when an understanding is reached. Understanding is from the heart and not from words" (p. 195).

6. Restoring Harmony: As a final step, the go-between arranges the setting in which the public reconciliation takes place. The intermediary first selects a place. For this, generally a "drinking house" or a Korean restaurant is selected where the persons are known and receive special attention from the owner. A private section is selected in the restaurant. This meeting is not supposed to take place in a house or in an office. Generally members of the same gender are present during this step. So, for instance conflicts between husband and wife are resolved more quietly and LeResche (1990) does not provide more information on how and where they are resolved (p. 198).

Upon entering the restaurant, each disputant pretends to be coming for a special event at the request of the intermediary until they see the other person, at which point they act very surprised. "This is a ritual that the conflicting persons play along with,

under the guise of responding just to a request for a casual pleasurable event with the intermediary" (pp. 197-198). Both persons are invited to the table.

The conversation, which takes place in this meeting, does not relate to the conflict. A lot of drinking of alcohol takes place. At some point, they will "share a glass" which is passed around the table. For this ritual, the eldest person pours from the bottle and each person must drink from the glass. The person who is most at fault pays the bill. If both persons admit the fault then they share the bill. After two or three hours of drinking, handshakes are made and all leave. At this stage, harmony is restored, meaning that the conflict is resolved.

In analyzing the Korean-American Harmony Model, LeResche (1990) helps explain whether Korean-Americans use formal, semi-formal, or informal institutions to resolve interpersonal conflicts. She writes:

> No structured semi-formal institutions for third party assistance in resolving interpersonal conflicts were identified within the Korean-American community. The formal mechanism used is the American legal and judicial system. However, it is only used out of utmost necessity and usually only when the conflict is with someone who is not also a Korean-American. For Koreans in America today, informal ways of handling conflicts predominate (pp. 128-129).

In her study which included 25 bi-lingual Korean Americans there was difficulty in reaching an agreement on the English word "conflict" in the Korean language. However, there was agreement for the concept of harmony, "*hwa*." As one interviewee declared, "We do not believe in conflict. We believe in harmony" (pp. 145-146).

The majority of the participants in the study described what they believed to be the best method to resolve interpersonal conflict: "[it] is for the persons directly involved to make quiet adjustments in their behaviors, coping with uncomfortable situations as necessary, putting the others' needs before one's own...'Resolved' is seen as having made

some type of compromise or accommodation" (p. 158). Reaching this compromise is a private affair. LeResche (1990) writes, "[p]eople try to solve problems by themselves, not involving other people.... Conflicts are to be kept as local as possible, quiet, and within the group. It is embarrassing for others to know that you do not have harmony in your family or group" (pp. 162-163).

All participants in the study emphasized the importance that the intermediary be known to the people involved in the conflict (p. 204). Other characteristics of this intermediary are, "[h]e is usually someone older, learned, with a reputation for being fair and wise...The one who has been in America the longest is preferred over a newer immigrant, for this person will know 'what is right in America'" (p. 205).

The next two models are practiced among the various ethnic groups of Pakistan. These models are chosen as they are from a high-context and a collectivist culture.

Interpersonal Conflict and its Resolution in Pakistan

The literature on this topic is scant and the majority of material available relates to the topic of political conflict between India and Pakistan. However, two sources, Ahmad (1980) and Shah (1992), discuss *Jirga*, a conflict resolution model used to resolve tribal conflict among the Baloch and Pukhtuns in Pakistan; and Yousaf [nd] deals with *Panchayat*, a social structure used among Punjabis to resolve interpersonal conflicts. I will describe these two conflict resolution models.

Pakistan can be characterized as a collectivist (Triandis, 1995) and a high-context culture (Hall, 1976). The family has an extended relationship. One's physical and emotional needs are met through the immediate family first and then through larger family or tribal affiliations. The majority (70%) of its people live in rural areas. There

are five main ethnic groups in the country: Punjabis, Sindhis, Pukhtuns, Baloch, and Brahvis. The national language, Urdu, is spoken by a very small number of people as their mother tongue. Most people speak Punjabi, followed by Sindhi, Pushtu, Balochi, Brahvi, and Sariaki. English is widely used in business, government offices, higher educational institutions, among the elite, and in the army. The majority (97%) of the population is Muslim; minority groups include Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis (Zoroastrians), and Zikrees.

Vittitow (1987), who did two years (1984-1986) of development work in Pakistan, provides insight into Pakistanis. He states:

> I find Pakistanis, like many other people in the third world, highly sensitive to interpersonal relations. When they decide to, they can make the foreign visitor feel valued, important, and cared for. We Americans are much less skilled in this quality of exchange of *being with*. I attribute this to our over-concern for task rather than people. We tend to segment our lives into blocks of time where we do only one thing at a time-work, play, rest, pray, etc. . . Third World people usually do the opposite (p. 5).

He describes some characteristics of Pakistanis:

> They are bright, opinionated, demanding, rigid, confrontative, divisive, conniving, abrasive, and, when mood and occasion require, are extremely gracious, generous, polite, solicitous, soft, and quiet. They greatly enjoy each other's company, becoming intolerably homesick when abroad for too long, and at the same time are highly skilled in irritating, tormenting, and bugging each other when so inclined (p. 5).

Vittitow (1987) also provides an insight of how Pakistanis view authority. He writes:

> For my tastes I found Pakistanis in their relationship with each other too observant of, and too subservient to, status, hierarchy, and authority. In Pakistan all organizations invest their top administrators with tremendous powers, rewards, and responsibilities (p. 6).

I find Vittitow's description of Pakistanis generally correct and also amusing. His insights about Pakistanis, their characteristics and how they view authority, hierarchy,

and status is useful information for understanding their interpersonal conflict resolution practices.

> Yousaf [nd] in his work helps explain the concept of *Biradari*. First, he defines it:
>
> *Biradari* is derived from the Persian word *Biradar* which means brother and thus *Biradari* means Brotherhood. In a broad sense it includes any type of brotherhood based on common language, occupation, geographical habitat, religion etc. *Biradari* consists of consanguine group [in] the strict sense (p. 1).

He describes the various functions of a *Biradari*. They include: protection, economic security, assisting each other in joy or suffering, creation of solidarity, and identity (pp. 4-5). One of these functions is to work as a local court. For the purposes of this study, I will explore this form of *Biradari* further. Yousaf [nd] explains the function of *Biradari* when serving as a local court:

> Mutual quarrels, Problem[s] of distribution of water and division of land. Marriage problems, Problems of any other nature [are settled through *Biradari*] (p. 5).

The description of his examples of "problems related to distribution and division of land" relate to the rural setting where the majority (70%) of Pakistanis live. In cities, one's *Mohalla* (neighborhood) determines *Biradaris*, and quarrels in the neighborhood are resolved through *Biradari*. Yousaf explains how these quarrels in the rural areas are resolved. "Normally the quarrels are settled by a *Panchayat* chosen by a *Biradari*" (p. 5).

The word *Panchayat* is defined by Meschievitz & Galanter (1982): "The term *Panchayat* literally means 'the coming together of five persons,' hence, the meeting, council, or court of five or more members of a village who assemble to judge disputes or determine group policy" (p. 48). The process of resolving disputes through a *Panchayat* is as follows:

A. Listening to all parties and to the information exposing the underlying issues.
B. *Panchayat* negotiates a solution accepted by all participants (pp. 48-49).

Yousaf explains three reasons why *Biradaris* use *Panchayats* to resolve quarrels:

1) Civil courts are too expensive.
2) Persons can not be treated in a personal way in civil courts.
3) Civil courts are too far from the people and are very few in number (pp. 5-6).

Now, I will turn to the work of Ahmed (1980) and Shah (1992) who provide the definition and explain the function of *Jirga* which is practiced among the Baloch and Pukhtun tribes in Pakistan. According to Ahmed (1980), *Jirga* is an "assembly of elders who are called to decide specific issues and whose decisions are binding on parties in conflict" (p. 90). He explains the importance of *Jirga*.

> In a society where there is no written or formal law the importance of an assembly is crucial in ordering society and preventing it from collapsing into anarchy. The *Jirga* regulates life through decisions ranging from the location of a mosque to the settling of conflict within sub-sections, to larger issues such as regulating foreign relations with other tribes and even conveying decisions of the tribe to the government (p. 90).

His reference to written or formal law pertains to the rural, tribal areas of Pakistan and not to settled cities where the law of the state applies and is enforced by civil courts. A typical *Jirga* may consist of five to fifty persons depending upon the importance of the issue. For those who do not obey the decision of the *Jirga*, the sanctions may include ostracism from the tribe, fines, and damage to property, such as burning his/her house (Ahmed, 1980, p. 91). Shah (1992) provides an account of *Jirga* as practiced among the Baloch. According to him:

> Balochi *Jirga* recommended a system according to which any dispute, tribal feud or common affairs relating to tribes whenever they arose within or among the tribes, were decided by the elders of the prospective tribe or tribes in accordance with the Baloch traditions and customs. The disputes and differences at issue under discussion in Balochi *Jirga* were decided unanimously. In case of difference of opinion, the majority decision prevailed (p. 27).

When describing the practice of *Jirga*, Shah (1992) uses the past tense and thus it is not clear whether *Jirga* is still widely practiced among the tribes in Balochistan. During my work in Balochistan from 1990-1992, I occasionally read in local newspapers about tribes calling for a *Jirga*. Additionally, there were a few cases in which conflicts among Pukhtuns and Baloch resulted in deaths on both sides. Each side called for a *Jirga* to proceed with the inter-tribal conflict. Ahmed (1980), on other hand, makes reference to the present use of *Jirga* among the Pukhtuns in the tribal areas of North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan.

In both the *Panchayat* and *Jirga* models the disputants and the mediator are known to each other and live in the same area. The mediators are generally older, command respect within the community, and are always men. *Jirga* is an assembly of elders (always men). *Panchayat* is an assembly of five or more men who are chosen by the *Biradari* (brotherhood or community) to resolve a particular conflict.

The work of Merry (1982) helps further elucidate the *Panchayat* and *Jirga* models described above. Merry (1982), in her work on the social organization of mediation, provides some characteristics of mediation models used in non-industrial societies. They include the process of mediation, the social organization of mediation, and the nature of mediated settlements (pp. 28-33). Regarding the process of mediation, Merry (1982) explains that "[m]ediation is prompt. Ideally, it occurs immediately after the incident, before the disputants have time to harden their position" (p. 29). She notes that people in the community know the nature of the dispute and the negotiation process is open for neighbors and relatives to give opinions or condemn the behavior of "unreasonable disputants" (p. 29). Merry (1982) writes that the mediation process concludes "with

immediate consummation of the agreement...in societies that lack written contracts, such an immediate exchange is the only guarantee of performance" (pp. 29-30).

The mediation is conducted by "[m]ediators [who] are respected, influential community members with experience and acknowledged expertise in settling disputes" (p. 30). Merry (1982) provides additional characteristics of these mediators. "Mediators are not outside authorities but informal leaders of kin groups, age grades, local hamlets or other social groupings. They are usually of higher social status than the disputants" (p. 30).

Merry (1982) notes that the chances of mediation succeeding increases when the disputants are from the same community. The disputants may be tied to the land or their relatives in a community. She notes, "When social relationships are enduring, disputants need to find a settlement to continue to live together amicably" (p. 31).

Finally, on the nature of mediated settlements Merry (1982) notes:

> Mediated settlements are backed by coercion. Although the mediator lacks authority to impose a judgement, he is always able to exert influence and social pressure to persuade an intransigent party to accept some settlement and, often, to accept the settlement the mediator advocates. The community also exerts social pressure on disputants to settle and abide by their agreement (p. 32).

The author also notes that at times these sanctions can be "supernatural." Merry (1982) provides an example among Pathans in northern Pakistan where "saints" mediate. In this case, if one of the disputants does not abide by the rules, these saints call their followers to "reinforce religious authority with military might" (Barth, 1959; Baily, 1972, 28ff., cited in Merry, 1982, p. 32). She notes that this becomes necessary "[s]ince mediators are usually powerful and influential, loss of their goodwill is itself a cause of concern" (p. 32). Merry (1982) gives a vivid example:

> One saint...arrived at a negotiating session where the disputants had agreed to appear unarmed only to find one party and his armed followers about to massacre his unarmed opponent. The saint whistled, calling out his own armed men hiding behind the bushes, thus quickly shifting his position from mediator to arbitrator (Barth, 1959, pp. 98-99, cited in Merry, 1982, p. 32).

The next conflict resolution model depicts a model native to Hawaiians. I chose this traditional model because it has been able to evolve over time to adapt to various influences and yet it retains its original character.

Ho'oponopono

A third party conflict resolution model which originated among Hawaiians is called *Ho'oponopono*. It means "setting to right...to restore and maintain good relationships among family, and family and supernatural powers...[It] is a method for restoring harmony that was traditionally used within the Hawaiian extended family" (Shook, 1986, p. 10). A metaphor of "tangled net," which is based on Hawaiian philosophy, is used in this process and is described by Shook (1986):

> Problems within a family affect not only persons directly involved but also other family members. The family is a complex net of relationships, and any disturbance in one part of the net will pull other parts. This metaphor reinforces the Hawaiian philosophy of the interrelatedness of all things (pp. 10-11).

Before describing this model, I will provide an overview of the diverse ethnic and cultural makeup of Hawaiian society. In one study Barnes (1992) reports that no one culture represents over 50% of the total population in Hawaii. In 1988, the ethnic composition of Hawaii was as follows: 24% Japanese, 21% part-Hawaiian, 20% Caucasian, 13% Filipino, 12% mixed non-Hawaiian, 5% Chinese, 1% Korean, 1% pure Hawaiian, .5% Samoan, .3% Puerto Rican, and .3% African American (p. 120).

Despite its immense ethnic diversity, Hawaiian society is permeated by collectivist Hawaiian values and culture (Barnes, p. 120). The family is comprised of

extended relationships, is made up of multiple generations, and has a spiritual connection to the past through its ancestor spirits known as *aumakua*. The structure within the family is hierarchical and authority rests with the family elders, known as *Kupuna*, who are respected for their wisdom and experience. Younger members of the family are expected to learn from the wisdom of the elders (Shook & Kwan, 1991. p, 213).

The first Christian missionaries arrived in Hawaii in 1820. With their arrival, many Hawaiians were converted to Christianity resulting in near abandonment of traditional Hawaiian religious practices and beliefs (Shook, 1992 and Pukui, Haertig & Lee, 1972). Pukui et al. (1972) give an example of how Christian missionaries changed a central Hawaiian religious and cultural value. Hawaiians observed religious and social occasions with feasting. "Food, often scarce, was precious. What was precious was symbolically offered to the gods. Also, eating was pleasant. Man felt closer to his fellow man when the *opu* (belly) was being filled" (p. 1).

Christian missionaries introduced fasting, which startled Hawaiians. They wondered if "the new God actually liked to have men be hungry. For Hawaiians had always invoked their gods by feasting" (p. 3). Over the years, Hawaiians who converted to different denominations of Christianity have incorporated fasting into their practices. The presence of missionaries also resulted in the incorporation of Christian values into the practice of *Ho'oponopono* (Shook, 1992, pp. 7-8). For example, while originally Hawaiians prayed to *aumakua* (ancestor gods), following Christian influence, the prayer is now directed to God and is read from the Bible (Pukui et al., 1972, p. 4).

Shook and Kwan (1991) describe the process of *Ho'oponopono* as complex and lengthy. The steps of a typical *Ho'oponopono* process include: prayer, statement of the

problem, discussion, confession of wrongdoing, arrangement of restitution when necessary, forgiveness, and formal release of the problem (pp. 218-220). The steps involved in the process of *Ho'oponopono* are described in the work of Shook (1992, pp. 11-12) and are summarized below.

With all the participants and disputants seated together, *Ho'oponopono* begins with a *pule*, a prayer, asking for God's help and blessing for the problem-solving endeavors. A senior person known as the haku leads the prayer. After the prayer, the problem is identified and the *haku* outlines the entire problem-solving sequence in order to reacquaint the participants with the steps. Once the climate is set, the leader begins the discussion by going through the many layers of the problem called *mahiki*. This process may be repeated several times if there is more than one problem. The *haku* asks questions and interprets responses at this time in order to identify the *hihia* or negative entanglements. The goal of this process is to get a clearer understanding of what created the negative repercussions in the family and what comprised the initial transgression (*hala).*

Once the *haku* identifies the *hala*, his/her role is to skillfully question the participants and monitor the verbal and nonverbal content of their responses. The *haku* also draws on his/her knowledge about the family to determine the causes of the problem. The *haku* prods the family to gain a full cognitive and emotional understanding of the problem and uses his/her authority to encourage the family to maintain correct behavior.

During the *mahiki* (discussion), all conversation is channeled through the *haku.* It is believed that since the parties already have animosity towards each other, direct conversation may lead to more misunderstanding and emotional outbursts, thus hindering

resolution of the conflict. Each party affected directly or indirectly by the problem is asked to share their thoughts and feelings (*mana'o*).

The parties are encouraged to present their side of the story honestly and openly. There is an emphasis on self-scrutiny and the parties are required to maintain an attitude of humility (*ha'aha'a*). If during the discussion tempers flare up, the *haku* can call for a cooling-off period (*ho'omalu*). During this period the parties are encouraged to reflect on what led to this outburst and on their original intention of restoring harmony and goodwill.

Once the discussion has uncovered the negative entanglements (*hihia*) and the initial transgression (*hala*), the *haku* checks if the parties are ready to proceed with forgiveness. If the parties are not ready to proceed with forgiveness, then there are a number of options available to them. The *haku* can call for more discussion of the problem if needed, or call for more time if one party is still resistant. In case of a true impasse, the *Ho'oponopono* may be concluded with a summary of the entanglements and problems that were uncovered and end with a prayer. In this case, future sessions are arranged until the conflict is resolved.

If both the parties are ready, then time is spent for mutual forgiveness, release of the negative emotional bonds, and laying the problem to rest. If restitution is to be made, it is discussed and arranged. The session ends with a closing prayer (*pule ho'opau*). The *haku* at this time instructs the parties to avoid any future discussion of the problem as it may bring back negative entanglements (*hihia*). The *haku* then announces that the session is concluded (*pau*). Finally, a meal (*pani)* is shared with the leader; this symbolizes their readiness to resume a normal life and to enjoy each other's company.

It is evident from the work of Shook (1986, 1992), Shook and Kwan (1991) and Pukui et al. (1972) that the process of *Ho'oponopono* is formal, religious, and cultural but not bureaucratic. Interestingly, this process was originally used as a family conference to resolve problems, and recently has been used by social service agencies at the community level. Some aspects have been modified to address its use in different settings. For example, instead of a *haku* leading the process, a social worker or a minister may now lead the process (Shook & Kwan, 1991, p. 218).

Some examples of the contemporary uses of *Ho'oponopono* are provided by Shook & Kwan (1991). At agencies, families presented problems of divorce, delinquency, domestic abuse, mental illness, as well as other less dramatic issues. They attribute the complexity of these problems to "the political, economic, and social realities in the Hawaiian community whose ways of life have undergone dramatic dislocation since Western colonization" (p. 224). The next section synthesizes the interpersonal conflict resolution models presented from high-context and collectivist societies.

Table 2.1 Synthesis of Interpersonal Conflict Resolution Models

Dimension	Korean-American Model	Hawaiian Model	Pakistani Model[1]
Who is in Conflict?	Small business owners Church members Family members	Family members tangled via Hawaiian philosophy of interrelatedness	Individuals part of extended family and community
Role of the Mediator	Contemplates, persuades morally and advises Has multiple roles Better if not a recent immigrant	*Haku* leads prayer, Discussion & unfolds Layers of problems Known to the family and uses that knowledge	Persuades morally Mediators from within the community Listens to community Consults religion/culture
Role of Others	Family and community participate in public reconciliation Religion guides	Family participates & Religion guides	Community & family assist, pressurize & advise. Local Muslim saints Advise
What is Negotiated & How?	Relationships Preserving Harmony through direct & indirect Negotiation	Restoring good relationships with family & supernatural Powers via *Haku*	Relationships Social & economic damage Direct & indirect negotiation
Possible Outcome (s)	*Kibun* is restored through apology Junior member compromises Celebration	Forgiveness. Prayer & meal. If needed closing prayer and future sessions continue till resolution	Settlement or punishment: ostracism from family and/or community/tribe

[1]. The model represented here is *Jirga.*

Synthesis

In Table 2.1, the first dimension refers to the parties involved in the conflict. The manifestations in all the three models indicate that a conflict can occur between two individuals or can involve an entire family or the larger community. For example, in the Hawaiian Model, the family members of a disputant are also affected by the conflict and participate in the various stages of its resolution process, called *Ho'oponopono*. The second dimension is the role of the mediator. In the Korean-American model, a mediator can be a fact finder, thinker, educator, philosopher, social coordinator, or an advocate (LeResche, 1990).

The third dimension involves the role of other people or institutions in the conflict resolution process, such as religion, family, or community members. In Pakistan, for example, a local saint may persuade the parties in addition to the members of a *Jirga* or a *Panchayat*. The members of the *Jirga* draw on the religion of Islam and the local culture when resolving a conflict.

The fourth dimension of "what is negotiated and how" is manifested in the way the negotiation is conducted; i.e. face-to-face, directly, or indirectly. In the Hawaiian model, the focus is on the restoration of relationships and in the Pakistani model there is a tradition of restitution. The final dimension, or "outcome", refers to the final agreements - both tangible and intangible. It is manifested through paying a sum of money for the restoration of *Kibun* in the Korean-American model and of *izat* in the Pakistani model.

A Brief Typology of the Literature Reviewed

In the first part of this chapter, I explored literature which describes Sri Lanka and its people, particularly plantation Tamils. This literature also addresses how the plantations were established and labor recruited from India to work on them. I also described the present plantations, the labor force which work on them, and the location of *Sooryan* where the research was conducted.

In the second part of this chapter, I reviewed the appropriate literature for understanding how plantation societies differ from non-plantation societies. To understand plantation society, I explored several "contexts" which describe specific features of these societies in Sri Lanka. These contexts are significant in understanding the interpersonal conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan,* which will be presented in chapters 5 and 6. For non-plantation societies, I reviewed Hall's (1976) work on high- and low-context and Triandis' (1995) work on individualism and collectivism. Using these frameworks to understand non-plantation societies, I explored the North American Mediation Model, which came about as a result of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) movement.

The Korean-American Harmony model represents interpersonal conflict resolution practices of an Asian immigrant group in the United States. It is significant that by the year 2050, Hispanics, Asians, American Indians, and African Americans will likely comprise 47% of the total population in the United States (Carnevale & Stone, 1995).

The Pakistani *Jirga* and *Panchayat* models are tribal and rural conflict resolution practices. The *Panchayat* model has special relevance to my research because it is also

practiced in India, where the *Sooryan* laborers' ancestors originated. The literature alludes to the plantation Tamils whose ancestors used this model in India before they were recruited to work on plantations.

Lastly, the Hawaiian *Ho'oponopono* model is significant in that it is addressing the contemporary confluence of Asian and Western values, beliefs, and practices in Hawaii. According to Haertig, Pukui, and Lee (1972), this should not pose any threat to the use of *Ho'oponopono*. They write, "*Ho'oponopono* may well be one of the soundest methods to restore and maintain good family relationship that any society has ever devised" (p. 70). The challenge for the use of *Ho'oponopono* is to unravel "Hawaiian beliefs and issues from Western and Asian ones, translate concepts and terms, and use multiple cultural frames of reference as needed" (p. 224).

In the next chapter, I will describe the methodology of research used for this study. I will explain how focus groups, individual interviews, and participant observations were used. I will also explain data analysis, trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overall Approach

This is a descriptive case study in which qualitative research methods such as interviewing (via individual and focus groups), participant observation, and analysis of documents were used. In choosing this research methodology, I am guided by Merriam's (1988) assertion that "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contribution to the knowledge base and practice of education" (p. 3).

This is my first qualitative research study. As such, I took the advice of Bogdan and Biklen (1992) who note that "most researchers choose for their first project a *case study*" (p. 62). Merriam defines case study as an "examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution or a social group" (p. 9).

Merriam also helps distinguish between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. She refers to quantitative research as "traditional research" which assumes that "there is a single, objective reality-the world out there-that we can observe, know and measure" (p.17). Qualitative research in contrast "assumes that there are multiple realities-that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring" (p. 17).

Merriam outlines characteristics of a case study. First, in a case study a researcher is "concerned with *process* rather than out-comes or products" (p. 19). Here the researcher is interested for instance in asking, "How do certain things happen?" (p. 19).

Secondly, a researcher is interested in *meaning* which is sought by asking, "how people make sense of their lives, how they structure their social worlds" (p. 19).

Thirdly, Merriam notes that the "importance of the researcher can not be over emphasized. The researcher is the *primary instrument* for data collection and analysis" (p. 19). The fourth characteristic of a case study involves "*fieldwork.*" Merriam emphasizes: "One must physically go to the people, setting, site, institution ("the field"), in order to observe behavior in its natural setting" (p. 19).

Merriam defines descriptive case study which "presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study. . ." (p. 27). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) note that in a descriptive study the "data collected are in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers" (p. 31). Merriam states that, "*Descriptive* means that the end product of a case study is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study" (p. 11).

I had outlined three research questions in my research proposal. They were:

1. How are interpersonal conflicts manifested among the laborers at the *Sooryan* tea plantation?

2. What are some of the Tamil words and phrases used by the laborers at *Sooryan* plantation to describe the English language construct "conflict" in their context?

3. What processes are used to resolve interpersonal conflicts and who is involved in these processes?

Based on the above discussion on the overall research strategy, a qualitative case study approach is the most appropriate for the research questions posed.

In the next section, I explain the research methods which I used for the study. They include participant observation, interviewing (individual and focus groups), and document analysis.

Participant Observation

According to Spradley (1980), "The participant observer comes to a social situation with two purposes: (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people and physical aspects of the situation" (p. 54). Schwartz & Schwartz (1954) stress the nature of relationship that is needed in participant observation. They write, "...the observer's empathetic relationship with the observed facilitates his[her] understanding of their inner life and their social world and increases the validity and meaningfulness of his[her] observations" (p. 350).

In order to allow for the greatest possible depth and richness in the study, I observed the members of the Tamil plantation community in their daily life: at their work when women plucked tea and men weighed the tea leaves, re-planted, fertilized, and pruned tea bushes. I participated with labor families in eating meals, in singing *bhajans* (religious songs of praise), and in worshiping at their homes and at Hindu temples on and near the plantation. I observed interactions on the plantation and in the areas near the plantation such as shops, schools, and roads. I observed social and work-related interactions between plantation Tamils and local Sinhalese, and among such groups as family members, friends and neighbors, laborers and managers, laborers and union representatives, local police staff, local hospital workers, bus and railway staff, and small shop keepers.

I observed their living conditions by visiting a student, who invited me to his house to show me their vegetable garden. At times, I played cricket and carom board with children and youth and went on walks with youth and adults who showed my around their line rooms where I often had a cup of tea or a cup of fresh milk with a family who had a cow. I inquired about their important religious and social festivals and with their approval participated in some of them. I visited the nearby school, which the Tamil plantation children attend, and observed how and under what conditions they were educated.

The purpose of the participant observation was to get a deeper understanding of the identity of this community and the nature of its social, religious and work-related transactions. This became possible only when I observed them in their social setting and at religious festivals and functions. By being present early in the morning at Sooryan, for example, I was able to understand the nature, process, and conditions of their work at the tea plantation. Through participant observation, I was able to observe the physical features of their homes, their worship in *kovils*, and the nature of their social and business transactions.

In using this method, I also made a conscious decision not to observe or participate in actual interpersonal conflicts at Sooryan. Even though I felt this would be an ideal opportunity for me to collect data, it could also endanger the safety of my research assistants and myself. Furthermore, I did not want to be in a situation where I had to take sides or jeopardize my relationship with any section of the community. Additionally, I made a decision not to accept invitations to drink alcohol with any

member of the community after learning and reading about the widespread abuse of alcohol on the plantations.

The observations were conducted at various times of the day, in and around the plantation. Tea is a year-round crop best cultivated by labor-intensive workers who reside on a plantation. Therefore, the timing of the start of participant observations was not crucial.

Since I went to Sri Lanka for the sole purpose of this study, I was able to devote my entire 15-month stay to this research. This duration allowed me, in addition to the data collection methods, to avail myself of other opportunities which provided information and insights about the plantation community in Sri Lanka. I participated in political and cultural activities planned and organized by the plantation community. Additionally, I spent considerable time with the staff of various local and international NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in Sri Lanka. These organizations have projects on education, nutrition for children and pregnant mothers, after school tuition for the youth, community organizing, micro-lending, promoting awareness of women's labor, alcoholism education and encouraging greater participation of the plantation community in the political activities in the country. This wider context prepared me with information, increased my sensitivity toward their unique problems and eased my entry into the community at Sooryan.

The data collection lasted 15 months and included approximately 2000 hours of observation. During this time, document analysis and interviewing, both individual and in focus groups, provided sufficient data about the *Sooryan* community, their interpersonal conflicts and the processes used in resolving these conflicts.

Document Analysis

The time spent on this method was considerably less than on participant observation and interviewing. I made three visits to the main office at the Sooryan plantation, which maintains files and registers of relevant information about its population. Information such as the number of workers, the nature of their work, their daily wages, and the facilities available to the labor and staff was collected from the office. The documents also provided information on the number of people living in a "line room", their religion, and ethnicity.

On each plantation, various trade unions represent the labor force. At *Sooryan*, I made five visits to the offices of trade union representatives and gathered information about the laborers' grievances, their conflicts with the management and their disputes with each other. I made one visit to the police station located near *Sooryan* to get information on the problems that the laborers report to the police and noted in which language the reports were written.

Interviews

In this study, I used personal and focus group interviews. For personal interviews, I was guided by Seidman's (1991) emphasis on the importance of personal relationships in interviewing: "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3).

I prepared the following preliminary questions as a guide for personal interviews. However, the order in which they were asked did not necessarily follow the order given below.

How long have you lived at *Sooryan*?

What are your spiritual beliefs?

How are your relationships with the *Kangani*/Field Officer and the superintendent?

Can you describe to me the interpersonal conflicts which occur on this plantation community?

On what occasions/days do these conflicts occur the most?

Have your grandparents or family elders in the community told you what they did when they had conflicts with each other?

Who do people go to when they have conflicts at work, with neighbors, or with the nearby community?

Who do people turn to for advice or guidance in seeking a resolution of their interpersonal conflicts?

Do you use any religious practices in resolving conflicts that occur in this community?

How does a person become a leader on this plantation?

What role does this leader play in resolving the interpersonal conflicts of the community?

What contributes to interpersonal conflicts in this community?

What are some of the Tamil words to describe a dispute or interpersonal conflict?

While interviewing, I followed the suggestions of Spradley (1979) in asking "grand tour" questions (pp. 86-87) in which an interviewer asks a participant to share a bigger segment of an experience. For instance, I asked a woman laborer, "What do you do on Sundays?" By asking this grand tour question, I was able to get information about a woman laborer's activities when she is not working on the plantation. Or by asking a trade union representative "Describe a typical day of your work," I was able to understand the nature of his daily work at a trade union's office.

I also asked what Seidman calls "mini tour" questions (p. 63). These are questions which the interviewer asks participants in order to get information of a "more limited time span of a particular experience" (p. 63). For instance, by asking a man and woman laborer separately "What do you after work?" I was able to get information of what a man or a woman does after work.

Because the work of a laborer at Sooryan never finishes, especially for women pluckers who perform housework afterwards, prior scheduling of interviews was limited. I was able to stay at the school located near the plantation over the weekends and go around the plantation with my research assistant to schedule the interviews for the day. Participants were always eager to be interviewed. Some of them would even walk to the school and express their desire to be interviewed.

I conducted semi-structured interviews. The questions were based on my own observations and drawn from the list of prepared questions. During all the interviews with the laborers, a research assistant was present. Before interviewing a woman laborer, the woman research assistant would spend some time alone with the participant, in order to create emotional comfort and trust for her. During this time, the research assistant

would explain the purpose of the study, the interview and answer any preliminary questions.

The participant observation phase also served as a selection process for interviewing a variety of people from different backgrounds. From these observations, and after understanding the structure of the plantation and the make-up of the nearby community, I chose the participants for my initial interviews. At times during an interview, additional names were suggested which I included in my list of people to interview. The final group of persons interviewed were:

1. The superintendent of the *Sooryan* plantation
2. Two field officers and two assistant field officers
3. Several *Kanganies* at the plantation
3. Several women laborers
4. Several men laborers
5. Union representatives who represent laborers of *Sooryan*
6. A mixed married couple, one Tamil and the other a Sinhalese
7. Several local leaders at Sooryan known as *Talaivars*

Initially, I had envisioned conducting personal interviews only. These were to be tape-recorded and later translated and transcribed. I changed my mind after encountering certain difficulties in conducting personal interviews using a tape recorder. For example, I recorded in my field notes:

> Today, during the interview in the line room, several children surrounded us. (The interviewee, research assistant and myself). Soon some men and women from the neighboring line rooms also came. Soon there was a small crowd of about 10 people. Children were intrigued by my small tape recorder. As the interview went on, they giggled and then one of them shouted a phrase in the

recorder and ran away. Two adults scolded him, which was followed by laughter by the rest (Field Notes, October 11, 1996).

During the personal interviews, a person would at times become cautious in answering questions as people gathered around. There was also very little privacy in the line rooms. Because of these two difficulties, I decided that: 1) interviews would be held at the nearby school or at the temple instead of at the line rooms. 2) In addition to the personal interviews, focus group interviews would also be held.

Personal interviews at the nearby school and at the temple on the plantation greatly increased the privacy and thus encouraged the participants to talk more openly and with courage. This was especially true of the women workers who hesitated to talk in the presence of men who often gathered around when the personal interviews were conducted in a line room. Encouraged by the success of personal interviews, focus group interviews were also conducted at the school and at the temple.

Focus Group Interviews

In outlining the purpose of a focused group interview, Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990) state: "The primary objective of the focused interview is to elicit as complete a report as possible of what was involved in the experience of a particular situation" (p. 21).

According to these authors, the advantages of a group interview outweigh the disadvantages. However, they caution, "This is not to say, of course, that an interview with ten people will yield ten times the amount of relevant data as the same kind of interview with a single individual" (p. 135). They point to a "more diversified array of responses" as one of the advantages of a group interview (p. 135). Additionally, Merton et al. cite three distinct advantages:

1. Group interviews provide a release of "social inhibitors." Merton et al. explain that: "As one ventilates his [her] experiences, this encourages others to ventilate theirs. If, in turn, the reports of these self-starting interviewees are met with rewarding expressions of self approval and support by the interviewer, they tend to establish a standard of conduct for the other, initially more inhibited, interviewees" (p. 142).

2. The second advantage of group interviewing is that it provides a broad range of responses. "The more people reporting, the greater the ascertained range of variation in pertinent opinions and responses" (p. 145).

3. The third advantage of the group interview is that it helps the interviewees to recollect forgotten details. Merton et al. explain: "As various pertinent matters are brought out in the group interview, it is probable that each interviewee will have matters brought to his [her] attention which he would have over looked or forgotten had he [she] been privately interviewed" (p. 146).

The authors also point to the disadvantages of a group interview. They are:

1. During a group interview, "Controversies or amicable discussion may spring up among interviewees and their subsequent reports may be more nearly related to this interplay of personalities and status claims in the group than to the subject matter on which the interview is centered" (P. 147).

2. In a group interview, there may be cases where an interviewee presents a topic totally unrelated to the discussion on hand and as such disrupts the continuity of the group discussion.

3. The focus group can be considered a forum where some interviewees "may find it humiliating to 'confess' in the quasi public situation of the group interview, to certain attitudes, sentiments or experiences" (p. 151).

Merton et al. assert that the disadvantages of a group interview can be overcome by applying the following guidelines:

A. The size of the group is crucial in allowing all of its participants to speak to the questions raised in the group. Merton et al. suggest using groups of about 10 to 12 persons. However they note, "Under certain conditions, it has been found possible to enlarge this number somewhat--to as many as fifteen to twenty--without undue deterioration in the value of the interview data and with some gain in its extensiveness" (p. 137).

B. The composition of the group will provide productive reports when the group members are selected on the basis of social and intellectual homogeneity. Merton et al. stress that "*educational homogeneity* outranks all other kinds in making for effective interviews with groups" (p. 138).

C. Merton et al. also note that "There is reason to believe that the spatial distribution of an interview group appreciably affects the spontaneity and character of the report" (p. 139). The authors caution against creating a classroom atmosphere by seating interviewees in rows. Instead, they suggest inviting the interviewees to sit in a semicircle.

In this study, I conducted five focus groups in addition to one sample focus group. The smallest group size was 6 and the largest size was 19. The sample group consisted

of 7 men and 9 women. All other focus groups were comprised of men and women, except the group of *Talaivars* and trade union representatives, which had men only.

The focus group interviews with trade union representatives were mostly conducted in English, since they spoke fluent English. In certain cases, staff members clarified some points in Tamil, which were later translated by the research assistant.

The focus groups consisted of:

1. Two groups of female laborers
2. Two groups of male laborers
3. One group of *Talaivars*
4. Two groups of trade union representatives

A sample group, at the suggestion of a local laborer, was conducted for men and women separately at the temple of the plantation. From this sample focus group, I selected three women and two men who were interviewed individually.

The format of the group interview was based on the principles of Andragogy: adults bring with them life experiences and can reflect on these experiences in the context of their day-to-day life. Each session started with personal introductions. In my introduction, I gave my name, the country I grew up in and the country I lived in prior to the study. I clarified the purpose of the focus group interview and explained the focus and purpose of my study. I stated that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the group any time they wished.

After explaining the study, I asked the participants if they had questions or needed and points clarified. The participants eagerly asked me several questions and made comments. A sample of these questions (**Q**) and comments (**C**) is presented below:

Q. Why are you doing this study?
C. Nobody has asked us these questions before.
Q. What will we get from your study?

Their questions and comments were truthfully answered by emphasizing that I was a student at a university in the United States and that the final outcome of this research would be a big paper available for everybody to read. They were insistent that I make the study available in Sri Lanka also. I promised them that I would send copies to the University of Peradeniya, where I got affiliation to undertake the study and also to a regional NGO which has a library section specifically devoted to the plantation issues. I also heeded to their advice to "Tell the world about our problems."

A list of questions was posted on the walls around the room where the participants could easily read them. The bigger group was divided into smaller groups and each smaller group was given sheets to answer the questions. After spending 45 minutes to an hour in the small groups and after having checked with them that they had sufficient time in going over the questions, the smaller groups were asked to present their answers to the bigger group. Together with the research assistant, I facilitated the discussion. It was stressed that they were no right or wrong answers and that this would be a time to react, clarify and share the information with the bigger group. They were encouraged to ask clarifying questions.

A sample of questions posted for men laborers to answer included:

What do most men on this plantation do after they receive their salary?

Describe your relationship with the *Kangani*, the Field Officer and the Superintendent.

What do *Talaivars* do on this plantation?

Describe your relationship with the outside community (hospital, post office, police station, and with shopkeepers).

Do you meet among yourselves to discuss any matters of concern to the community in a line or in a division? How often?

A sample of questions posted for women laborers to answer included:

What do most women do on their free day?

Who does most of the housework and what does it include?

Describe some of the disputes you have with the *Kangani*, the Field Officer and the Superintendent.

The focus group interviews proved to be highly effective. From the pedagogical standpoint, the participation and involved discussion were engaging. The discussion in the bigger group served not only to validate the information gathered but also proved to be an opportunity where a certain depth and clarity was added to the questions.

The participants got really involved in the small group discussions. However, it was a big challenge to keep them on track for the agreed-upon time. Almost all focus groups, particularly with the laborers, ran longer than planned. One focus group was initially planned for two and half hours but lasted for six hours.

Sampling

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) point out that the research design is an evolving process in which the questions to be asked and the data to be collected emerge throughout the research process. For the sample of this study, I used an "evolving process" (Bogdan and Biklen) because I needed to "discover, understand, gain insight" (Merriam, p. 48)

about the plantation community in Sri Lanka. In order to gain an insight about this community, I first interviewed what Merriam (1988) calls "key informants" (p. 75). She describes as the role of an informant "to adopt the stance of the investigator, thus becoming a valuable guide in unfamiliar study" (p. 75). In order to approach the key informants, I utilized my contacts, which I had built in 1994 when I monitored Sri Lanka's elections. I needed these key informants to answer my questions, to share my research study, and to provide me with overall guidance in Sri Lanka. The following persons and institutions served as my key informants:

1. Staff of various NGOs working with the plantation population, particularly the staff of Satyodaya and the Institute of Social Development in Kandy. I extensively used the library at Satyodaya, before I started my data collection at *Sooryan*. In addition to these NGOs, I also had long conversations with representatives of several other NGOs based in Hatton, Badulla, and Colombo.

2. The professors and the staff at the University of Peradeniya in Kandy, particularly Professor M. Sinnathamby.

3. The staff of an international NGO, CARE with offices in Colombo and Kandy.

4. Three superintendents of tea plantations in the district of Kandy.

5. The faculty and staff of Sripada College near Patna.

6. A professor from the Eastern University of Batticoloa, named S. Sivathamby.

Once I felt I was adequately familiar with the area and had built a significant network of informants, I conducted two focus groups and interviewed four laborers.

A. One focus group was conducted on a plantation in the district of Badulla.

B. The second focus group was conducted in the district of Kandy.

In both of these focus groups, men and women were in separate groups. In addition, I interviewed the following:

- a woman laborer from a plantation in the district of Badulla.
- a man laborer from the same plantation as above.
- a *Kangani* from a plantation in the district of Kandy.
- a *Talaivar* from the same plantation in Kandy.

Access to Site

Since I conducted this study as a foreign national in Sri Lanka, I had to follow certain government and other requirements, necessary for foreign researchers to do a study in the country. First, I obtained a resident visa, a government requirement for foreign researchers in the country. Secondly, I affiliated myself with a local university, another requirement for researchers (see Appendix A). Thirdly, as a privatized plantation, a management company runs Sooryan. The managers of the plantations are extremely reluctant to allow outsiders, especially foreigners, to come to their plantation. According to them foreign researchers take pictures and talk to the laborers and then they tell the world how bad the conditions are on the plantations. Before starting my data collection, I obtained written permission from the management of *Sooryan* plantation (see Appendix B).

Additionally, there are several personnel of non-governmental organizations representatives and professors of local universities who do development work in the plantations. I informed them about my research focus and sought their advice in gaining access to the subjects at *Sooryan*.

I was also mindful to approach the subjects in culturally appropriate manners and ways, which would not jeopardize their safety. On my arrival in the country, I sought advice of people who have considerable knowledge of the plantation community. Professor M. Sinnathamby from the university of Peradeniya gave the following tips for my research:

> **1.** Caste plays a major role in the lives of the plantation community. However, if you want to find out about someone's caste, ask a third person so as not to embarrass the person in front of others if they are from a low caste.
>
> **2.** Interview women separately in small groups. This will help them to talk openly without feeling intimidated.
>
> **3.** Maintain good relationships with the representatives of all the trade unions on the estate. Have a meeting with all of them present and explain to them the focus and purpose of your research.
>
> **4.** Maintain good relationships with the management of the estate.
>
> **5.** If possible get access to the community through an NGO working in the community or through a teacher who instructs the children of the plantation workers.
>
> **6.** Do not write on forms or papers in their presence. This will indicate that you are gathering information, which can be shared with police, management or the government agencies. Do not ask them to sign anything. Instead, have some respected person like an NGO worker introduce you and in his/her presence explain your study, their rights, what you plan to do with the findings and how you will ensure their safety (Interview, June 7, 1996).

Rationale for Selecting the Site

This research site was chosen for the following five reasons:

It was the only plantation where the senior management granted me permission for my study. I approached the management of five different plantations to discuss my research and to get their approval. All except one expressed their mistrust of foreign

researchers as people who come to plantations and take pictures of line rooms and latrines and then distort the "terrible" conditions to the outside world.

Secondly, this plantation was easily accessible by bus from Kandy, the town where I lived during my stay in Sri Lanka. Trips to this plantation from Kandy took 4-6 hours and the travel costs by public transportation were reasonable. Many of the other plantations in the area were not easily accessible and required private vehicles.

I shared the choice of my research site with a professor at a local university who grew up on a plantation and who has also done research and development work among the plantation community. He recommended *Sooryan* for its location, size, and openness to researchers. He was also instrumental in introducing my study in such a way that I was granted permission by the management.

Fourthly, I hired local plantation Tamil research assistants. Since my arrival in April 1996, I had heard from local residents and also observed first hand excessive questioning by police of Tamils at police and army checkpoints and in and around plantations. Because of an on-going civil war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) a Tamil group from the North and East (Jaffna Tamils) there is a state of emergency and a high level of security in effect throughout the island. In this climate every Tamil, including those who live on the plantations, are viewed with great suspicion.

While visiting an estate during the site selection process, my research assistant, a Tamil woman, and myself were taken to the police station for lengthy questioning. This experience scared both of us. The security of my research assistant and myself during

this study was of paramount concern to me. Also for this reason, I wanted to select a plantation which was not too remote, and travel was reasonable from Kandy.

Finally, by selecting one plantation for my study I was able to focus my energies on my study. Since accommodations in the field are very difficult to find and inadequate for lengthy stays, a lot of time is spent traveling to and from the site.

Ethics

In determining the ethics for this study, I was guided by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) who state, "two issues dominate recent guidelines of ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm" (p. 49). In Sri Lanka, I followed local cultural norms and governmental regulations, which guided me in approaching the subjects at *Sooryan* in a way that my research did not pose any harm to them. I followed the requirements of the Sri Lanka government to gain access to the research site (see Access to the Site). In this way, I was able to gain the confidence of the community. I never entered Sooryan until the management granted me written permission and introduced me and my study to the *Sooryan* staff and community.

In addition, I followed the guidelines of the Human Subjects Review Committee of the Graduate School. Initially, a consent form was designed to get the individual consent of the people to be interviewed. After being advised that asking the plantation labor to sign a form may be perceived by them as me taking information to the police, army or the management of the company, I chose not to ask them to sign the individual consent forms. Instead, at each individual and group interview the content (see Appendix C) of the consent form was read and explained to the plantation labor in Tamil by a research assistant in my presence. Participants were encouraged to ask questions or seek

any clarifications about the study and about their role in it. Only after their questions and comments were answered by me and they had agreed to participate in a personal or focus group interview did the process continue. Once the individual and focus group interviews started, none of the participants withdrew from the study. On the contrary, they were always eager to come for more opportunities to talk with me.

Trustworthiness

In establishing the trustworthiness of this study, I followed the guidelines provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their emphasis on the "truth value" of a study (p. 290). Additionally, I consulted with the work of Maxwell (1996) and developed the following strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Feedback

According to Maxwell (1996), "Soliciting feedback from others is an extremely useful strategy for identifying validity threats, your own biases and assumptions, and flaws in your logic and methods" (p. 94). He suggests that one should get feedback both from persons who are familiar with the setting and those who are not familiar with the study and its setting. In Sri Lanka, I sought feedback in the following ways:

(1) I sought the guidance of local university professors who provided me with feedback during and after my research in the country. Two of these professors are internationally known for their work and writings on the plantation Tamil community. Professor M. Sinnathamby is an Economics professor at the University of Peradeniya and has worked on various developmental projects among the plantation Tamil community and continues to guide those who want to and are working in this community. Professor S. Sivathamby of Eastern University in Batticoloa is known for his writings and his deep

understanding of the community and its problems. Both of these professors provided me with invaluable insights and were always eager to listen to me and provide feedback during data collection. Additionally, my affiliation with the university of Peradeniya provided me with an advisor, a professor of sociology, with whom I consulted and sought his feedback at the various stages of data collection.

(2) In Sri Lanka, I presented the findings of my research at two formal occasions. The first presentation was made at one of the oldest NGOs working mainly among the plantation community in the country. It is called Satyodaya and is based in Kandy. A combination of university professors, local NGO community development workers, foreigners working with international organizations in the country, and my research assistants were present in this meeting. It was held on February 20th, 1997.

The second presentation was made at the University of Colombo's Law Faculty's department known as Center for Policy and Research Analysis (CEPRA). The purpose of these presentations was to share the literature guiding the study, its design, findings, and to get feedback from the participants. It was held on March 29th, 1997. My notes from these presentations show the nature of feedback I got from some of the participants.

> A foreign volunteer who has been working in the country for the last three years asked me why did not I choose quantitative research methods. He suggested I could have done this by measuring the frequency of interpersonal conflicts, which occurred at Sooryan, and then note them down. He argued that this would provide a better picture of the conflicts than by mere personal and focus group interviews.

Another one remarked:

> Your examples of their interpersonal conflicts show the nature of their problems. I wish we could have heard from you earlier. You have been working very diligently on your research.

One participant inquired:

> Can you generalize the findings of your research from your findings at *Sooryan* to other tea plantations? As I was about to answer, Professor M. Sinnathamby answered that since the structure of the tea plantations are very similar, the findings at *Sooryan* can be applied to other tea plantations in the country.

Triangulation

In explaining triangulation Marshall and Rossman (1995) note, "Designing a study in which multiple cases, multiple informants, or more than one data gathering method are used can greatly strengthen the study's usefulness for other settings" (p. 144). In this study, the data was triangulated by, 1) getting varied responses and then comparing the different sources, 2) by actively being involved in the study for 15 months, with the sole purpose of conducting this research among the plantation Tamils, and 3) by observing the settings of the Sooryan at different times, on different social and religious occasions, and by staying overnight very close to Sooryan on many occasions.

Preparation for the Study

In preparing for this study, I acquired basic conversational knowledge of Tamil spoken by the plantation community. I used the cross-cultural skills which I acquired in my previous development work among Afghan refugees, Pakistani government and business officials, Armenian community development workers, US Peace Corps

volunteers, German educators, British volunteers, and among Sinhalese and Tamils during an election monitoring trip to Sri Lanka in 1994. Through my previous visits to Sri Lanka, I was aware of the brutal civil war in the country.

I expressed my experiences of learning Tamil in one of the daily English newspapers of Sri Lanka.

> I remember vividly my first few words and sentences of Tamil such as, *Epadi suchum*? *Ungada peer enna*? *Ninga iinga pooringa*? I got immense joy as I practiced them at a *Kade*, a tea shop, or with children at the plantation. Linguists say language is a social behavior. As my vocabulary increased and I got more confident making short sentences, I noticed I could interact with more people at the plantation. This in turn gave me courage and motivation to learn and practice more Tamil (Jilani, 1997, p. 15).

Although my Tamil competency never reached the stage where I could converse at great length or depth, it however, was significant in showing my respect to the community when for instance I greeted them in Tamil by saying, *Vanakam*. I was best with the children as I did not feel inhibited with them. They conversed with me as if I knew the language and thus, in the process I was able to improve my language. My long stay in the country and the basic knowledge of Tamil provided me with a deeper understanding of the social perception and the political place accorded to the Tamil language in Sri Lanka. The majority people and the institutions of the government despised both the language and the people who spoke it.

I utilized my previous cross-cultural experiences in learning new behaviors and skills to live in another culture. Even though I had funds to rent private vehicles to travel to the research site, I traveled on trains and local buses, which the plantation Tamil community also uses in the country. This provided me with an opportunity to observe them in different settings than the one at the plantation. I also observed with my own

eyes their treatment from the Sinhala officials when they traveled via government transportation. I recollected some in an article, which I wrote in Sri Lanka. "I have witnessed bus conductors pushing and shoving plantation workers and the driver by-passing a halt where Tamil school children were waiting to get on the bus" (Jilani, 1997, p. 15).

Member Validation

According to O'Grady (1992) member validation is a "method through which participants in a study are asked to assess and comment on the researcher's results" (p. 86). In this study, I attempted the member validation in the following ways:

A) I shared the results of a focus group interview conducted with the labor and presented it for discussion to the *Talaivars* and trade union representatives who represent laborers of Sooryan. This served not only as additional triangulation method but as a sounding board of the accuracy of the information as well.

B) Since research assistants were present at all the individual and focus group interviews and since they translated the transcripts from Tamil into English, I shared the transcripts, which I had noted down and had improved the language.

Data Management

While collecting data in Sri Lanka, I explored safe and secure ways to record data from observations, interviews, and from documents. During my stay in the country, there were periodic electricity shortages and there is no electricity whatsoever at the research site. So even though I had brought with me a portable computer, I was not able to use it unless I was in a big city and there was power. Accordingly, I adjusted to the reality in the country. I used hardcover notebooks to record my interviews, field notes and

information from the documents at the plantation office and trade union offices and later transferred them to the computer during the hours electricity was available.

During all personal interviews with the laborers, a bilingual (English-Tamil) research assistant was present. The superintendent of the plantation, staff members, staff of the trade unions, the medical doctor and the police officer speak fluent English. In cases where an interviewee spoke Tamil, the research assistant helped in the translation of the interview. Later these interviews were translated and transcribed in a notebook. Soon after the interview or at the end of the day, I sat with the research assistant and recorded the interview in a hardcover notebook.

Periodically, the interviews were transferred to the computer on the hard drive. These computer files were backed up onto floppy disks and hard copies maintained. Computer and hard copy material were paginated numerically in chronological order. Each page is identified by the date the material was obtained, the setting, and the participants involved.

Data Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (1995) caution that data analysis is "a messy, ambiguous, time consuming, creative, and fascinating process" (p. 112). My approach to data analysis followed that suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Marshall and Rossman (1995), Patton (1980), and others in its emphasis on generating categories, themes, and patterns, and searching for alternative explanations of the data.

For instance, Bogdan and Biklen provide advice which I found very useful in analyzing the data for this study. They note: "analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for

patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learnt, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 153).

While in Sri Lanka, I began categorizing the interpersonal conflicts manifested in the plantation community at *Sooryan*. For instance, I connected the categories to individuals or organizations that play an active part in the resolution of these conflicts. I arranged especially my interviews with the laborers which were conducted in Tamil. I checked the accuracy of the translation with my research assistants. Once my data was arranged, I read it several times and categorized it. Some of the categories that emerged from data analysis are the following:

Suspicion

Problems, Problems

Conditions

Water

Sinna Dorai, Perria Dorai (small boss, big boss)

Talaivar

Kangani

Field Officer

Drinking

Festivals

Money

Salary

Line Room, Lines, Divisions

Expensive

Bribes

Identity Cards

I created files of each of the above categories. I read these files several times. Each of the above categories was further coded. For example, the file coded "water," was further categorized as follows:

water tap

location of a water tap

times when water is available

nature of fights at the water taps

laborers' experiences at the water taps

superintendent's views on water problems

Likewise, the file coded "talaivar" was categorized as follows:

how laborers describe a talaivar

how a talaivar describe himself

role of a talaivar

qualifications to be a talaivar

how is one selected

I then wrote a narrative of each category and arranged them into separate files.

Limitations of the Study

This study has four main limitations. They are:

1. I gathered data at only one plantation Tamil community in Sri Lanka. Although all tea plantations in Sri Lanka share a common structure, the social reality on each may be manifested differently. Therefore, I cannot generalize from this plantation to others of pre-dominantly Tamil population nor to plantations of mixed ethnic and religious composition.

2. It may be considered that the research is limited by who I am. I received my higher education in the west and I look like a Sinhalese, the majority ethnic group in Sri Lanka. During the fieldwork, I was supported by a fellowship, which in US dollars was much more than a Tamil laborer at this plantation would ever make in a year. I entered the country and did the study as a privileged person. But as an Asian, who grew up as a member of a religious minority group in Pakistan and who now lives as an ethnic minority in the United States, I also brought with me my experiences, solidarity, and empathy to this research study. I went to Sri Lanka with a desire to make Asian knowledge part of the current practice and theory of interpersonal conflict resolution, a need which first motivated me to undertake this research study.

I also felt a need to advocate on behalf of the plantation Tamil laborers of Sooryan through this case study. Stake (1995) notes that researchers try to "convince their readers that they too should believe what the researchers have come to believe" (p.93). He adds "[researchers] too are advocates" (p. 93). I also reminded myself to be aware of the biases with which I went to this study and was encouraged by the words of Kreiger (1985) who says:

> We see others as we know ourselves. If the understanding of self is limited and unyielding to change, the understanding of the other is as well. If the understanding of the self is harsh, uncaring and not generous to all the possibilities for being a person, the understanding of the other will show this. The great danger of doing injustice to the quality of the "other" does not come about through use of the self, but through lack of use of a full enough sense of self which, concomitantly, produces a stifled, artificial, limited, and unreal knowledge of others (p. 320).

All of these shaped the lenses through which I interpreted and interacted with the plantation Tamil labor community at Sooryan.

3. I was also limited by not knowing the language of this plantation community. In order to overcome this limitation, I employed two bi-lingual research assistants. These research assistants were present at all the interviews with the plantation labor. I also spent 4 months taking lessons in conversational Tamil (see under trustworthiness). I spent considerable time (15 months) in learning the language, culture, and socioeconomic conditions of the plantation Tamil people. I approached local universities and NGOs working among this community and sought their help and advice in locating experienced research assistants. I checked their references and inquired on their past experience as research assistants. Once they were selected, I trained them in interviewing skills and had them practice these skills through role-plays with others and me and gave them feedback on their skills.

4. Even with the steps I took above, there is a possibility that I have lost information while it was translated from Tamil into English.

Delimitations of the Study

This study has been delimited in the following ways:

1. Although in Sri Lanka there are Tamils who live in nearly all other parts of the island and also those who work on rubber and coconut plantations, this study is limited to the Tamils who live on a tea plantation.

2. On any given tea plantation, the workforce is comprised of staff and labor. The staff mostly works as junior and senior office clerks, field officers, estate medical assistant (EMA), assistant superintendent, and the superintendent. Laborers do the manual work of plucking tea leaves and pruning, fertilizing, and digging. Most of the staff members are Sinhalese, the majority ethnic group in Sri Lanka. On some plantations, Tamils also occupy staff positions. This study is limited to the Tamils who are labor on a tea plantation.

3. The plantation Tamil laborers were brought by the British from the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu where currently some 65 million Tamils live (explained in detail in Chapter 2 which provides the context of the study). This study is limited to Tamils who live on a tea plantation in Sri Lanka.

4. Sri Lanka has another minority Tamil group known as Jaffna (a city in the north) Tamils who mostly live in the north and east of the country. They comprise 13% of the total population. This study does not include Jaffna Tamils.

5. In my participant observation, I interacted with the children at the plantation also. However, I have not interviewed children. For the purposes of this study, I have interviewed men and women over the age of 18 years.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the overall methodology and methods of participant observation, personal and focus group interviews, and document analysis that I used in this study. I also described how these methods were used. I highlight the limitations of this study and how I established the trustworthiness of this study. The next chapter will describe the setting of the *Sooryan* plantation.

CHAPTER 4

THE SETTING OF *SOORYAN* PLANTATION

In this chapter, I describe the setting of the *Sooryan* plantation. I first explain the general area where *Sooryan* is located. I then elaborate on various features of the plantation including 1) the layout, 2) the organizational structure, and 3) the conditions under which the laborers live and the nature of their work. I describe the tasks women do at work and at home and explain various activities of the community. I highlight the relationship of the management with the labor. I elaborate the roles of trade unions and the functions of resident trade union leaders at *Sooryan*. I conclude the chapter by explaining the relationship of the *Sooryan* community with the surrounding local community. This setting provides the ground work to understanding the nature of their interpersonal conflicts and their resolution, which are explained in the next chapter.

Sooryan plantation is located in the district of Nuwara Eliya. Hollup (1994) notes that this district is the "nucleus" of the up-country and is the only district in the country where the plantation Tamils are the majority (59.8% in 1981) of the total population (p. 48).

To reach *Sooryan* by bus from Kandy takes about 4-5 hours. A more pleasant way to travel to *Sooryan* is via train, which averages about 4 hours if there are no delays along the way. This area is known as "up-country" or "hill area". Here, tea plantations are everywhere. I recall my first trip to the area.

> The train edged slowly towards the hilly area after it stopped in Nawalapitiya. Along the way, there were several fields cultivated with rice and smaller fields with vegetables. As the train moved up, rolling hills of lush green tea plants could be seen from the both sides of the train. There were some patches of trees here and there. On some hills, women were plucking tea leaves and as the train came closer to their hill, some of them waved and smiled while others took a pause to see the train go by. The air here felt much fresher than in Kandy and Colombo (Field Notes, June 16, 1996).

Hollup (1994) provides some additional information about Nuwara Eliya and notes that 67% of the population of this rural district works in tea cultivation (p. 48). He explains that the altitude and the weather conditions determine the quality of the tea and the part of the world to which it is exported. In chapter 2, I explained the locations of tea plantations in the country. These locations are based on the altitude where tea is grown. Low-country tea is grown below 2,000 feet and is found in the districts of Galle and Matara. The mid-country tea is grown at 2,400 feet in the districts of Kandy, Matale, Kegalle, and Ratnapura. The up-country tea is grown between 4,000 and 6,000 feet and is grown in the district of Nuwara Eliya. The Uva tea is a high quality tea and is grown in the district of Badulla (Hollup, 1994).

I explained how I decided to do my study at *Sooryan* plantation in chapter 3. Both the office and the tea fields at *Sooryan* are situated near the Hatton-Nuwara Eliya main road. It is a busy road during the day time as government and private buses, lorries, and tourist vans pass on it. The road also connects to the major cities of Kandy, Hatton, Colombo, Nuwara Eliya, and Talawakelle as well as to smaller towns. *Sooryan* is also accessible by train to the nearby station in the town of Kotegalla.

Kotegalla, a small town along the Hatton-Nuwara Eliya road, has a variety of stores, which are called *Kade* in Tamil. Laborers from *Sooryan* and nearby plantations come here to buy goods for their daily needs, such as rice, spices, lentils, milk, biscuits, vegetables, fruits, dry coconuts, betel leaves, arecanuts, jaggery (palm sugar), dried tobacco, liquor, and cold drinks. A bus ride from *Sooryan* takes five minutes to reach Kotegalla and costs three rupees. There is a Hindu temple in town which is frequented by Tamils in Kotegalla, as well as by Tamils from the nearby plantations, including *Sooryan*. Near the railway station

there is post office and a petrol depot. The petrol is brought by trains to this depot and then distributed by trucks to nearby towns. In the middle of town, there is a bank and a petrol station. There is a high school in the town which was constructed by a German Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).

Most of the shop owners in Kotegalla are Tamils. There is one Muslim merchant who came to Sri Lanka 40 years ago from Pakistan and now lives in Kotegalla. He built several shops and later sold all except one, which his son runs today.

A much smaller town between *Sooryan* and Kotegalla is Rosita. It has a few *Kades*, three small restaurants, a liquor shop, and a library. The Milk Board has its collection center in Rosita. The milk is collected in trucks from the plantation families who have cows and then distributed to the other parts of the country. In Rosita, there is also an office of a local NGO, which works among the plantation community.

Hatton, the hub of the up-country plantation area, is 10 minutes away by bus from Kotegalla and has a population of 10,000 people. Hollup (1994) notes that Hatton is an important commercial, administrative, and educational center in this area. It has many shops, which are mainly owned by Tamils. It has a vegetable market, banks, jewelry shops, liquor shops, cloth shops, cinemas, a few restaurants, and tea halls (p. 49). Many laborers come here to shop and buy in bulk, as the prices are cheaper than in the *Kades* closer to their plantations. There are several schools and offices of local NGOs in Hatton.

On one side of *Sooryan* are the towns of Rosita and Kotegalla and farther away, Hatton. On the other side of *Sooryan*, there is the small town of Patna, which is in the direction of Talawakelle. The town of Patna can be reached in 15 minutes by foot from *Sooryan*. Patna has a police station, a small post office, several kades and the offices of

trade unions, which represent labor on several plantations including *Sooryan*. Near the town of Patna, there is a famous teacher training college, known as Sri Pada College.

Near *Sooryan* and on the Hatton-Nuwara Eliya road, there is a government high school, a hospital, and an Anglican church. The school has around 400 students, almost all Tamils, who come from the nearby plantations. The school runs two daytime shifts to accommodate this student population. All the teachers are Tamils and they commute from nearby towns including Kotegalla and Hatton. The school is about a ten minute walk from *Sooryan* and many children from *Sooryan* attend it. Most of them come by foot, but some use local buses.

The nearby hospital has in-patient and out-patient facilities. It is a government hospital. The staff consists of a DMO (District Medical Officer), an RMO (Registered Medical Officer), six nurses, four midwives, one dispenser, one clerk, and nine laborers. According to the DMO, the hospital covers 95% of the plantations in the area.

The Anglican church near *Sooryan* was built by the British. According to its pastor, it is more than one hundred years old. Its age is evident from its graveyard located at the back of the church. There are several graves of British planters and their families who worked in this area. The present pastor is a Sinhalese who also speaks Tamil. The church runs a small nursery school for children of the plantation laborers. Some of the church members come from *Sooryan* for Sunday services and send their children to its nursery school.

In this area, there are tea plantations all around. Lush green tea bushes planted over rolling hills dominate the landscape of this area. This is where *Sooryan* is located. On each

side of the Hatton-Nuwara Eliya road, passing through this area, there are tea-planting areas belonging to *Sooryan.*

Sooryan Plantation

The plantation of *Sooryan* consists of three divisions. A division, according to Hollup (1994) is a unit of production and each division is socially and geographically independent. Yet, all the divisions are linked to each other. Inside the plantation the clay roads are paved and zig zag sometimes along the tea bushes and sometimes through them. The same roads also connect to each of the three divisions at *Sooryan.*

There is a tea factory, which is located close to the main administrative offices of the plantation. The entrance to the factory and the office is through a gate, which is guarded by a laborer. The bungalows of the plantation Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent are located on the plantation as well. The staff and the plantation labors also live on the plantation.

The Population of *Sooryan*

The work force at *Sooryan* is comprised of labor and staff. The labor force consists of men and women. Most women pluck tea while men perform sundry work which includes pruning, fertilizing, digging holes for new tea plants, repairing plantation roads, and clearing or cutting trees.

There are 778 labor families residing at *Sooryan.* These families have a total population of 2804 people. Of these, 95% are Hindus, about 5% are Christians, and one family is Muslim. The staff includes 26 families for a total population of 121 people. The total labor force from all the three divisions at *Sooryan* is presented in the table below:

Table 4.1 The Labor Force at *Sooryan*

Division	Females	Males	Total
Sivapooh	185	148	333
Manjal	168	127	295
Pachai	83	68	151
Total Labor	436	343	779

Source: *Sooryan* Plantation Office

The total number of 779 laborers includes (737) registered workers and (42) casual workers. According to the Chief Clerk of the *Sooryan* office, registered workers are the first to be offered work. In case of need or when there is an abundant crop, casual workers are hired. According to the Chief Clerk, casual workers become registered when there is a need for more permanent workers.

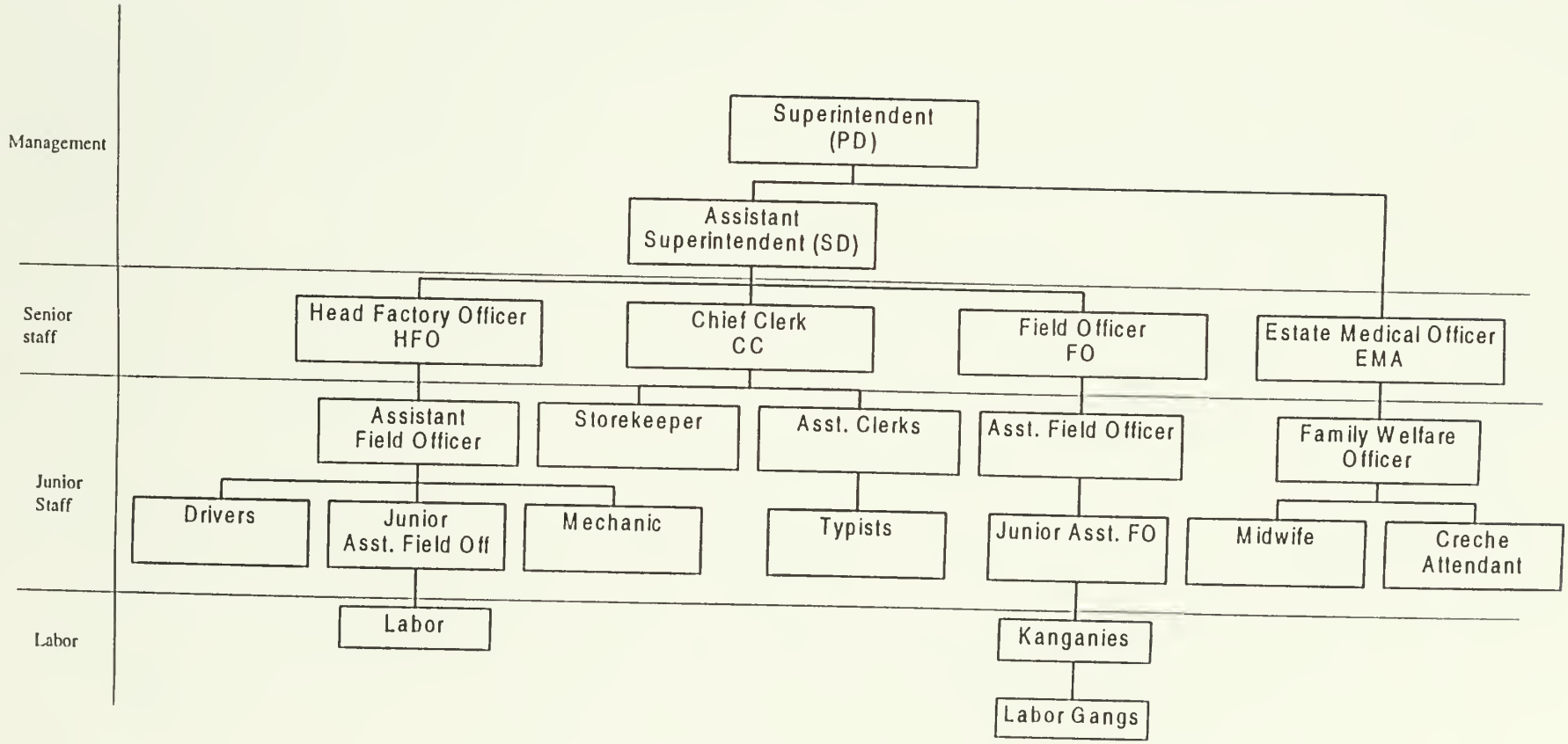
The staff consists of 37 people at *Sooryan*. They include: a Superintendent, an Assistant Superintendent, a Chief Clerk and eight people who work under him in the main office. These and other staff positions and their place in the hierarchy of the organization become clear by looking at the organizational chart of *Sooryan* on page, 108.

Bureaucracy at *Sooryan*

The management structure of *Sooryan* can be best described as top down, hierarchical, and male dominated. It is important to remember that the present management structure of the plantations in Sri Lanka is essentially the same as the one created by the British. Hollup (1994) reminds us that the only change which has occurred is that of the color of the manager. Now the manager is a "local master" who replaced the earlier white and foreign master (p. 152). He goes on to describe the nature of the plantations in the country and writes that plantations are "total institutions" and when the British ruled the country the estates were considered "petty kingdoms" and the superintendents had almost absolute power and authority (p. 152).

The organizational structure of *Sooryan* is divided into four tiers (see Figure 4.2). The first tier is that of senior management and includes the superintendent, known in Tamil as *Peria Dorai*, and the Assistant Superintendent, known in Tamil as S*inna Dorai*. The second tier consists of staff who manages the four major operations of *Sooryan*. These operations are: 1) the tea factory, 2) the office, 3) the field, and 4) the medical and crèche facilities for the laborers. The heads of each operation report to the Superintendent via his assistant, except the head of medical and crèche facilities who reports directly to the Superintendent. Hollup (1994) refers to the heads of these operations as department heads.

The third tier includes junior staff and includes various support staff such as assistants, typists, drivers, *Kanganies*, and crèche attendants. The fourth tier consists of laborers who primarily work in the tea factory, pluck tea leaves, and perform sundry work. As explained in chapter 3, the focus of this research is the labor force at *Sooryan*.



Adapted from Hollup (1994), p. 153

Figure 4.2 Organizational Structure of the *Sooryan* Plantation

I will call the Superintendent of *Sooryan*, Udaya. He is in his early forties, tall, and big. Both he and his assistant, also a man, easily stand out by the way they dress. Most of the time they wear shorts with matching shirts and boots with stockings. Both are Sinhalese and speak English and Sinhala. They have picked up Tamil as well. The managers of a plantation are also known as planters. I inquired from Udaya about the qualifications required to become a planter. According to him there are three main requirements: first, a family background, meaning ideally one comes from a family of planters; second, the school one has attended, generally a renowned English medium school; and thirdly, whether one has played sports in school.

At *Sooryan*, Udaya divides his time between the factory (20%), the office (40%), and the field (40%) where the tea is grown. When I asked him how he become interested in his job of being a planter, he responded:

> I come from a family of planters. My father was a planter. Later he became the director of a plantation company and now he is retired. I started my schooling in St. Thomas's college in Colombo, then my family moved to Kandy, and I finished my schooling at the Trinity College there. I joined planting in 1978 (Interview, February 13, 1997).

Both the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent are provided with bungalows to live in on the plantation. In addition, they each have two to three laborers working in their homes. They include an *Apu* (cook in Tamil), a gardener, and a gatekeeper. In addition, Udaya has a pickup truck and a driver. The assistant superintendent has a motorbike. Not far from *Sooryan*, there is a club which the managers of various plantations frequently attend. The club has a bar and a cricket field.

During my stay in the country, I noticed that there is an awe and a mystique with which ex-planters recall their working or growing up on a plantation. One gets a sense

they were kings when they worked as managers. Their stories include reference to their management style or to the wonderful days and life they lived on the plantation. While selecting a site for my research, I visited various plantations. Writing field notes after one visit, I titled my entry "kingdoms."

> At the very sight of superintendent, the women laborers who were taking a break and drinking tea stand up as the superintendent's pickup truck passes in which he is showing me around the plantation. He takes me to a bungalow which is being renovated. The workers in the bungalow stand still and look scared as he gives me a tour. Outside the bungalow, there is a big stone marked 'London' (Field Notes, June 30, 1996).

The management style on the plantations is rooted in the backgrounds of the early managers. As Hollup (1994) writes: "The authoritarian style of management on the estates is related to the fact that some of the first planters were former military officers who took up planting as an enterprise and adventure after their retirement" (p. 154). He goes on to describe the present make up of the plantation managers in the country. "The estate management consists almost exclusively of high caste Sinhalese recruited from well-educated and wealthy families belonging to the local and national elite residing in Colombo and Kandy" (p. 155).

I inquired from Udaya how he manages laborers at *Sooryan*. He compared his management style with that of his father's.

> Fifteen years ago, it was dictatorial. That time you could hit a laborer. I remember when my father was a planter. We lived on the plantation. One day, the whole family went out to a social event. On our return, my father found the gatekeeper of the bungalow sleeping. He hit him very hard. He thrashed him. Now days you can not do this. You have to listen to the labor. Hitting a person is the last resort (Interview, March 4, 1997).

Udaya is candid about the problems of the labor at *Sooryan*. He pointed out some, saying: "Their living conditions are not up to the mark. They have water problems

which I think are caused because they either steal the pipes or break them" (Interview, March 4, 1997). I inquired from him if he was aware of the interpersonal conflicts which the laborers have at *Sooryan*. He told me that he was aware of things like water disputes, eloping, and walking through another's line. He went on to explain the nature of the conflicts that laborers have with the management. One serious incident he related was due to his predecessor not paying attention to some problems which the laborers had brought to his attention. As a result, the laborers beat him up badly. Udaya remarked, "His blood is still on the cash register" (Interview, March 4, 1997).

The second tier of staff can be considered as senior staff. They include a) a Chief Clerk, b) a Field Officer for each division, c) an Estate Medical Assistant, and 4) a Head Factory Officer. Each of these positions is supported by their respective staff.

The Chief Clerk is responsible for payroll, correspondence, and record keeping. The Superintendent depends upon the Chief Clerk for all administrative matters. At *Sooryan*, the office of Chief Clerk is next to the Superintendent's office. The door which connects them remains open. The Superintendent has a large table in his office. On the wall, there are various charts. One bar chart shows the yearly production of tea at *Sooryan*. He has a telephone and an attached bathroom next to his office. On a typical day, much communication takes place between the two of them. When I inquired from the Superintendent how old *Sooryan* was, he immediately called the Chief Clerk who guessed that *Sooryan* was at least 100 years old. It is the Chief Clerk who knows the schedule and the whereabouts of the Superintendent. The Chief Clerk is assisted by several typists, assistant clerks, and a storekeeper.

The overall atmosphere relaxes when the Superintendent is not in the office. On one side of the office of the Chief Clerk, there is a window where occasionally laborers come with their questions and requests. Even though I found the staff friendly, the laborers often looked fearful while standing in the window. The day I was sitting in the office, two laborers came to request a salary advance.

The Field Officer is in charge of the overall operations of the field. Each division has a Field Officer, thus the three divisions of *Sooryan* have an identical supervisory structure. Each Field Officer is assisted by junior and assistant field officers. A Field Officer plans and manages various tasks related to plucking and sundry work. The sundry work consists of pruning, weeding, fertilizing, planting, repairing roads, and manual work.

Hollup (1994) notes: "One of the capabilities required is [the Field Officer's] ability to make estimations regarding labour input per hectare, and the time needed for the tasks to be completed" (p. 159). Once the tasks have been assigned in the morning, *Kanganies* go with their gangs of laborers who carry out plucking and sundry work. The work of the *Kanganies* and the laborers is supervised by Assistant and Junior Field Officers throughout the day. The Field Officer is present at all three weighings of the tea leaves during the day.

The Estate Medical Assistant (EMA) is in charge of medical and welfare facilities for the labor force. The EMA at *Sooryan* is a Sinhalese man. He maintains a record of sicknesses, deaths, births, and medicines. The medicines are provided free to the laborers and minor illnesses are treated at the plantation dispensary. For serious illnesses,

accidents, and when women are to give birth, a plantation vehicle is called by the EMA to take the patient to the hospital.

At *Sooryan*, laborers also go on their own to private doctors and hospitals of their choice. While standing at the bus station outside *Sooryan* I met Jaya, a laborer at *Sooryan.* He was taking his 6 month old baby boy to a hospital in Talawakelle. The baby had developed a rash and Jaya did not trust the EMA or the nearby hospital. Hollup (1994) also points out that many EMAs have been accused by the laborers for not taking genuine interest in the well-being of the laborers and their families (p. 160).

The Family Welfare Supervisor works under the EMA to oversee the general welfare and living conditions of the laborers. At *Sooryan*, the Family Welfare Supervisor is a Tamil woman. Her job consists of visiting line rooms and suggesting improvements to the management. She also oversees the crèches on the plantation. Mothers can bring their young children to these crèches while they are working.

The Head Factory Officer is in charge of activities related to the manufacturing, packing, and shipping of tea at *Sooryan* plantation. He is assisted by assistant and junior field officers, drivers, and mechanics. In addition, there are laborers who work at the factory. Their work includes loading tea leaves for drying, running various machines, separating various grades of tea, packing, and loading.

Kanganies are basically laborers who over the years have learnt the skills required for their job at the plantation well. This helps them get promoted to the position of a *Kangani*, which in Tamil means a supervisor. They live like other laborers in the line rooms. The job of *Kangani* however, adds to their power and prestige at the plantation. According to Hollup (1994) the labor force has "little social differentiation" except when

a laborer becomes a *Kangani*, then he enjoys the "authority and prestige" which comes with the position (p. 163).

Siva is a retired *Kangani* at *Sooryan*. He is 55 years old and has lived all his life at this plantation. He developed back pain and has stopped working. I asked him how a laborer becomes a *Kangani*. He gave the following qualifications to be promoted to the position of a *Kangani*:

> **1)** One must physically live on a plantation for at least 15 years.
> **2)** One must have worked as a laborer for at least 15 years and know the work very well.

Siva adds that the promotion to *Kangani* is not based on one's caste. This is also clarified by Hollup (1994) who notes:

> Today the *Kanganies* are selected irrespective of their caste as the estate gangs have a mixed caste composition. What really matters is their efficiency, skills and how they manage the labourers (pp. 163-164).

Some *Kanganies* take the additional role of *Talaivar*, which in Tamil means a leader. A *Talaivar* represents one of the various trade unions and lives on the plantation. His role and the work of trade unions are explained later in this chapter. *Kanganies* supervise the work of a gang, which numbers anywhere from 25 to 30 laborers.

At *Sooryan,* all *Kanganies* are men. Most of the labor force is engaged in either plucking or doing sundry work. Most women pluck and most men do the sundry work. A typical day for a *Kangani* starts early in the morning when he reports to the Field Officer at the muster shed. The term "muster" is a military term used by the retired British army officers who became planters and brought the management style and terms used in the army to control and command the plantation labor force (Hollup, 1994). A muster shed is a small hut where the *Kanganies* and junior and assistant field officers

gather to get the details of daily assignments. I recall visiting one muster shed at *Sooryan.*

> The Field Officer read out various work assignments from his little note book. The *Kanganies* follow the orders very carefully, nodding their heads several times and repeating, yes sir, yes sir (Field Notes, August 29, 1996).

Once in the field, a *Kangani* is a boss. He shouts instructions, scolds, and even insults according to some laborers at *Sooryan.* His instructions are followed by groups of women pluckers who move obediently from one hill to another plucking tea leaves.

Women Laborers at *Sooryan*

In order to understand the work of women at *Sooryan*, I refer to the study of Kurian (1982) which provides the overall context of the nature of women's work on tea and other plantations in Sri Lanka. She highlights four main characteristics of women's work. Firstly, all the estate women, in addition to working at the plantations "also do household tasks, whether they are tea pluckers, rubber tappers or casual workers on coconut plantations" and the time spent on various tasks "is dictated largely by the demands of their estate work" (p. 85). Secondly, their work is monotonous.

Thirdly, they work throughout the day at different intervals and this "impresses upon them that their work is never over" (p. 85). Fourthly, these tasks take up so much time of the day that they have little or no time left for social contacts outside their work. Kurian concludes that the above four realities of their work make the conditions in which the women live and work precarious; their lives are "controlled by men from the time they wake up to the time that they went to the bed" (p. 85).

In my observations of women laborers at *Sooryan*, I found them more visible than men. At work, the groups of women were much larger than those of men. They are

visible at home cooking, cleaning, disciplining children, and taking care of visitors. At times, I noticed them doing several things at one time. For example, I visited a woman laborer who stayed home for the day at two in the afternoon and observed the following:

> Rani is cooking rice over an earthen stove and holding her 15 month old son in her lap. The kitchen is smokey. In between, she is disciplining her two other kids who come running in and out of the kitchen. A neighbor stops to ask for some spices. The boy has fallen to sleep in her lap. She checks the rice occasionally as she talks with us (Field Notes, September 19, 1996).

Even on Sundays, when they are not plucking, women are attending to the house and family work. As one worker explained: "On Sundays, I clean the house, collect firewood, do some shopping, and look after the children" (Interview, February 23, 1997). In a conversation with another woman plucker, I inquired what she did on her annual leave. The list of things she described included: visiting friends and family members who live on other plantations, cultivating the vegetable garden, white washing the house, and doing house work.

The paid work of women on tea plantations is primarily that of plucking (Hollup, 1994). Plucking on a plantation is strictly organized and monitored. This work is supervised by a male *Kangani*. At *Sooryan*, the women are told the previous day which field they should go to pluck on the following day. Each plucker is expected to pluck 18 kilos of leaves. This is known as a "norm". A norm is fixed by the management according to the availability of the crop[1]. If a plucker meets the norm, she/he gets a "full name" or a full daily wage[2].

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[1] During my field work, which lasted from June 1996, to July, 1997, the daily norm was fixed at plucking 18 kilos of tea leaves.

[2] The daily wage during the data collection period was 83.00 rupees. In the same period the official rate of one US$ was approximately 60.00 Sri Lankan rupees.

A typical day of a woman plucker starts early in the morning. At *Sooryan,* I observed women plucking on several occasions. Once I observed the following:

> It is 7 am and women are hurrying bare footed to their assigned fields with their baskets on their back which hang with a string from their foreheads. Some of them are chewing betel leaves, while others prepare their betel leaves as they walk, with a white and pink lime paste and dried tobacco leaves. Along the way, some of them stop to remove leeches from their feet and ankles (Field Notes, September 3, 1996).

Once in the field, they wrap big plastic sheets around their waists so that their sarees will not get wet from the early morning mist on the tea bushes. Throughout the day, Kanganies shout instructions and orders and the women follow. The leaves of each plucker are weighed at three different times during the day. The first weighing is around 9:30 a.m., the second around 12 p.m., and the last one around 5 p.m. One morning at *Sooryan*, I observed the following:

> A Field Officer and two *Kanganies* are overseeing the weighing at a temporary weigh spot. It is 9:30 in the morning. The women are lined up, each bringing their sacks or buckets to the men who weigh them. They are carrying with them a small notebook in which the supervisor enters the amount. The weight varies from 2 kilos to 4 kilos. The Field Officer explains that the average is 3 kilos (Field Notes, November 3, 1996).

Line Rooms and Living Conditions

The resident labor of *Sooryan* lives in housing known as "line rooms" provided by the management. There are several lines or rows of houses for the labor. Hollup (1994) explains: "Each line is a long barrack-like building with 10-12 rooms in a row" (p. 53). The Ministry of Housing Construction and Public Utilities (1996) notes: "Housing in the plantations is provider-based and tied with employment. Housing is provided free, without any form of tenancy arrangement and on the basis of one housing unit per worker family" (p. 5). The same ministry also criticizes the housing conditions. "The vast

majority of the plantation families still live in 19th century, old type barracks, so-called line rooms, in a deplorable situation un-acceptable in present times" (p. 1).

There are various kinds of line rooms at *Sooryan*. For example, in one of the divisions at *Sooryan*, there are 17 lines of rooms provided to its 332 resident labor families. These lines consist of single lines, back to back lines, and cottages. In this division, there are 13 single lines, 2 back to back lines, and 2 cottages. A single line houses on average 10-12 families, a back to back houses 24 families, and a cottage houses two families. In addition to these, there are 38 "temporary sheds" at *Sooryan*. These sheds, made from clay, were made by laborers, with the approval of the plantation management, on the vacant lots. The temporary sheds are just like the line rooms and were necessary to house several labor families as there were not enough line rooms on this particular division.

Each line room is approximately 10 x 12 feet. There is a small veranda in front of the house and a small space in the back, which is used for kitchen. None of the line rooms at *Sooryan* have electricity, toilets or water in them. Lack of electricity for the plantation community in the country is a national problem. The Housing Ministry recognizes this noting "About 98% of the line rooms do not have electricity" (p. 6). Outside each line, there is a water tap, which serves as the only source of water for the families in an entire line. One tap of water is for the use of 10 to 12 families. On the sides of lines, there are latrines. It is common for the residents, especially children, to use open spaces for latrines.

There is an average of 10-12 people living in a line room. Bala, whose house I visited, has 18 people, an exceptionally large family at *Sooryan*. Living with him are his

grandparents, his uncle, his uncle's wife and their children, and his father, his father's second wife, and their children. Bala is 18 years old and attends the local school, which is a 5 minute walk from his house. While sitting in his house, I asked him where he slept in the room. He told me that he sleeps on the ground under the bed of his grandmother.

While I was in Bala's house several children including some from the neighboring line rooms gathered. One of them was Bala's 5 year old step-sister, Malini. She attends the nursery school at the Anglican church. Her father and some other family members asked her to recite a nursery rhyme. Malini was first shy but with encouragement from almost everyone in the room recited a few couplets from a nursery rhyme in Tamil:

Nila Nila Odi Wa
Oh! Moon come here running
Nillamal Odi Wa
Don't stop anywhere and come here running
Malai Mele Yeri Wa
Climb the hill and come
Malligai Pooh Kondu Wa
And bring me a jasmin flower

(Translated by the Research Assistant)

In the back of Bala's house, facing their kitchen, they have a small vegetable garden. Next to the garden, there is a shed for two cows. The vegetable garden and the cows are two sources of extra income for the family. This is in addition to their plantation income. His uncle informs me that they make between 1000 to 2000 rupees per month from selling the vegetables to the shop owners in Kotegalla. They make about 1000 rupees per month from selling the milk to the Milk Board. The cow dung is also sold and it brings around 600 rupees for one load of a lorry. The milk is collected near the plantation at a *Kade* by a middle man for the Milk Board.

Unlike Bala, Ganesh a 17 year old student has a smaller family. He has two younger sisters. The 13 old Radha dropped out from school a year ago and now helps her mother at home. Her 10 year old sister, Bawani attends the local school. Ganesh's father is a retired Kangani and has lived all his life on the plantation. One evening, I visited the family when Bawani was studying.

> We climb on the bricks to enter Ganesh's house. The family is repairing their line room. Part of the floor is still wet from a cement and sand coat. We sit in the drier part of the room. In one corner, Bawani is studying on a floor mat in the light of a kerosene lamp, the only one in the room. The other lamp is in the kitchen where the mother and her other daughter are preparing the evening meal. The light from the kerosene lamp is very dim (Field Notes, December 19, 1996).

As I interview Ganesh's father Murali, we can hear loud radio music from their neighbor's line room. Murali informs me that it is a daily occurrence and many times, they can not go to bed early because of the loud music. He informs that the noise becomes even louder on salary days.

The staff of 37 at *Sooryan* are provided with living quarters as well. In contrast to the laborer's housing, the staff lives in independent spacious houses with indoor plumbing, toilets, and electricity. Staff quarters are scattered around the three divisions of the plantations. The Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent live in bungalows. The Superintendent's bungalow is near the tea factory on top of the hill and the Assistant Superintendent's bungalow is at the top of one division.

Life of *Sooryan* Youth

In one of the divisions of *Sooryan* there is a football field, which is also used for cricket. The boys of *Sooryan* are passionate about cricket due in large part to recent victories of the Sri Lankan cricket team, including the World Cup which they won in 1996. Upon learning that I was from Pakistan, they often joked with me about which

country would win if Pakistan and Sri Lanka played. The field is used regularly by the boys of *Sooryan*. On one of my visits, I described them playing football:

> Most of the players are playing in bare feet. Two of them have only socks on. A row of youth is sitting on the side and shouting instructions at the players or joking with each other. After the game, players come and talk to me. They ask me if I can buy them shoes as they have a tournament to play (Field Notes, October 11, 1996).

One of the school teachers tells me that they are a very good team. Two weeks later, the *Sooryan* football team is victorious in the tournament they entered.

During my visits to *Sooryan* over my 15 months in the country, I have always seen the youth playing with improvised toys and games, climbing trees, swimming in the nearby small canal, and chasing and teasing each other. Younger kids of 7-10 years of age make toys from different items. One I noticed was a small truck made from an empty can with which four of them played.

Bhajans at Bala's house

Every Thursday evening, *Bhajans*, or songs of Hindu worship are sung in Tamil at Bala's house. Two rooms down from his house, the family also sings *Bhajans* but they sing on Fridays and in honor of Sai Baba, a renowned spiritual leader who lives in India. One Thursday evening, I spent two hours at Bala's house.

> There is a group of 20 people all sitting on the floor. Most of them are children who were sitting in the front rows. I recognize some of the children from the nearby line rooms. They are wearing clean clothes and are well groomed and facing one side of the room where pictures of various Hindu gods and goddesses are hanging. There is a solemn atmosphere in the room. Various clay coconut oil lamps are burning. Incense sticks are placed at various places in front of gods. On two plates, there are rose petals. There are two coconuts. Bala's father leads the bhajans. He is only wearing a sarong and no shirt. From a book, he sings the words of a bhajans while the rest of the group sing after him. He is accompanied by a *dholak* (a hand held drum) and symbols. The session lasts for about an hour (Field Notes, June 13, 1996).

After singing, Bala's father breaks the coconuts in halves and offers them to the gods while reciting prayers. He takes the rose petals and does the same thing. On one plate, there is sweet rice and in a glass, there is milk. After blessing them, he offers the rice and milk to every one in the room. There was a very peaceful atmosphere in Bala's house. All the prayers were led by men while women waited in the back.

Kades

In one of the divisions at *Sooryan*, a family owns a *Kade* in their home. Unlike *Kades* in Kotegalla and Hatton, it is much smaller and carries only basic items such as rice, sugar, betel leaves, incense, matches, candles, and bread. According to laborers here, this *Kade* also sells liquor. One night on a pay day, I noticed several men drinking in front of the *Kade*.

Outside the gate of *Sooryan*, there are three additional *Kades*, two of which are owned by Sinhalese and one by a Tamil. One of the *Kades* also makes tea. During my visits to *Sooryan*, I drank tea here and became friends with its owner, Muttu. His mother still lives on another plantation nearby but he moved to start the *Kade* and to make a better future for himself.

On one string in his small *Kade*, he has hung small packets of *potu*, (decorations on foreheads mostly worn by Hindus) which are made in New Delhi, India. He also has balloons, hair pins, and ribbons in different colors displayed for sale. In the window of his *Kade*, he has displayed several jars of sweets and biscuits. All jars have labels in English. One jar has a label of Chix Peppermint, the others say Twinkle Candy, Coconut Candy, and Benson's Toffee. It is a popular place for school children and laborers. The

children buy sweets, note books, and pencils, while the laborers buy betel leaf and dried tobacco, and drink tea.

I once inquired from Muttu if he sells and/or buys goods on credit. During one of my visits to his shop, I got the answer to my question:

> Muttu shows me a book in which he keeps accounts of the people at *Sooryan* who owe him money. He tells me it amounts to Rs. 500 and looks worried. A small truck stops. It is a supplier who has brought bananas, coconuts, and dried tobacco. Muttu and the Sinhalese supplier negotiate the price in Sinhalese language. Muttu decides on the coconuts and the dried tobacco and tells me that the bananas are too expensive. The supplier leaves the details of the sale on a small piece of paper and Muttu informs me he will return the money in installments (Field Notes, January 27, 1997).

Muttu's *Kade* also serves as the place where milk is collected from the families at *Sooryan* by a middle man. The middle man is a retired Field Officer from another plantation and now lives nearby *Sooryan* in a small town. I will call him Raja. He keeps his empty milk jars at Muttu's *Kade*. He speaks fluent English and explains the procedure of collecting milk from the families.

Raja has a lead meter, which according to him measures the contents of fat in the milk. He collects milk twice a day--once in the morning and once in the evening. Each time, he dips the meter in a glass of milk, which he takes from the container of the person who has brought milk. He tells me the milk people bring is good. Around 9 am a truck with Milk Board written on it in English stops at Muttu's *Kade*. Raja lines up all the jars of milk, which are then poured into the truck. For his work, Raja gets a commission from the Milk Board.

Trade Unions

In order to understand the present day work of trade unions at *Sooryan,* it is important to understand the evolution of trade unions on the plantations in Sri Lanka. Hollup (1994) notes that: "Trade unions in Sri Lanka were first established by A.E. Goonesinghe, an active trade unionist working among Sinhalese urban workers predominately in Colombo" (p. 185). During this period, plantation workers were not included in the unions. Due to the efforts of Natesa Aiyar, a journalist from South India, the first plantation community was organized into a trade union when he organized All Ceylon Estate Federation in 1931. Both Goonesinghe and Aiyar tried to organize the Sinhalese and the Tamil workers. However, their efforts failed due to communalism and economic depression in the country. It was not until Nehru visited Sri Lanka in 1939 that a trade union called the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) "started to organize trade unions to defend the interests of Tamils in the hill country and on the plantations" (p. 185).

Trade unions on the plantations play a significant role in the affairs of the laborers. The purpose of this study is not to present the work of trade unions in great length but to explain the roles they play in resolving interpersonal conflicts of the labor at *Sooryan.* Hollup (1994) notes that on the plantations most of the labor is unionized to the degree that "almost 90%" of the labor are organized through a union (p. 190). He also remarks that despite the high participation of laborers in various unions they do not necessarily have "strong bargaining power and unity in the trade union movement" (p. 190).

There are six different trade unions represented at *Sooryan.* They are: 1) National Union of Workers (NUW), 2) Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union (LJEWU), 3) Ceylon

National Workers Congress (CNWC), 4) Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), 5) Ceylon Party of Workers (CPW), and 6) Up Country Peoples Front (UPF). Each union has a local representative who lives on the plantation known as *Talaivar*, or in Tamil, a leader. A *Talaivar* is a laborer who is selected by a trade union. The above trade unions have offices in towns near the plantations. The job of a *Talaivar* is to recruit members and to represent them in their personal and job related problems and conflicts.

In a focus group interview with *Talaivars*, I inquired about the qualities required to be selected as a *Talaivar* by a trade union. They gave the following:

1. One who has good behavior
2. One who can speak to the management with respect but without fear
3. One who can get things done
4. One who is living an exemplary life so that it will create a good impression in people's minds
5. One who is helpful to the people (Focus Group, September 17, 1996).

All the *Talaivars* in the focus group were men. According to them, a woman *Talaivar* does not represent the laborers to the management, only men *Talaivar* represent the laborer at *Sooryan*. Even though, the men *Talaivars* described the above role of women *Talaivars*, I did not find a single woman *Talaivar* during my 15-month study in the country.

A *Talaivar* plays various roles in the lives of the labor at *Sooryan*. First and foremost, it is his job to recruit labor into his union. At *Sooryan* every July and December, there is a membership drive when laborers are approached to join a respective union. Once a laborer joins a union, he or she pays 20 rupees each month, in dues to the union. Out of the monthly dues, the *Talaivar* gets a small amount as a commission for his efforts in recruiting the labor and representing their interests.

Broadly speaking, a *Talaivar's* work is primarily of two kinds. First, laborers approach him when they have an interpersonal conflict with a neighbor or in their own family. Secondly, he represents laborers to the management, police, and trade unions for work-related disputes with a *Kangani*, Field Officer, or the management. The nature and extent of the dispute determine whom he approaches on behalf of the laborer.

The trade unions represented at *Sooryan* have their offices in Patna and Talawakelle. They are generally small offices with a staff of 2-3 persons. Each office I visited had a typewriter and some had telephones also. The staff was fluent in English. In the office of CWC, there are big pictures of Gandhi, Nehru, and their founder and current minister in the government, Mr. Thondaman.

In my personal interviews with representatives of these trade unions, they were unanimous in describing the primacy of their role of representing plantation laborers at *Sooryan.* A CWC representative's remark summarized what others told me, "I am here to look after the problems of the workers" (Interview, February 12, 1997).

In my observations and meetings with the trade union representatives, I did not find a single female representative at their offices near *Sooryan*, despite the fact that the majority of laborers at *Sooryan* are women. Hollup (1994) explains their absence from the trade unions and notes:

> Women workers, who constitute more than 50 percent of the work force, are still excluded from the trade union activity and leadership positions at all levels of the organizations. This is due partly to the fact that they have two jobs, one in the production and other in the domestic sphere; hence, they have no time. But it is also related to the prevailing attitudes regarding the position of women in society. The women workers' membership in a trade union is decided by her husband, usually the head of the household (p. 199).

In a focus group with *Talaivars*, a retired *Kangani* and a retired *Talaivar* agreed that historically a man's advice is better than a woman's advice (Focus Group, January 16, 1997).

Sooryan and the Outside Community

The people of *Sooryan* come in contact with the community outside their plantation in number of ways. I will describe a few of these interactions, which also highlight the treatment they get during these contacts and transactions.

As I described in chapter 3, I used local transportation such as government and private buses and trains to commute from Kandy, the town where I lived for the 15 month duration of this research, to *Sooryan*. Additionally, before starting my research at *Sooryan*, I spent considerable time during the sample phase of my research on other tea plantations in the country. This provided ample opportunities for me to observe and sometimes participate in events, which exposed the relationships between the majority Sinhalese community and the plantation Tamil community in different parts of the plantation areas.

I explained in an article published in Sri Lanka:

> I have witnessed bus conductors pushing and shoving plantation workers and the driver by-passing a halt where Tamil school children were waiting to get on the bus. I have heard announcements at the Hatton train station made only in Sinhala (Jilani, p.15).

The police station which serves *Sooryan*, is about 10 minutes by foot from the plantation. In a visit to this station, the officer in charge told me that his station covers an area which is 70% plantation areas and 30% Sinhalese areas. It has a staff of 36 police constables and 3 officers; the majority Tamils (24 constables and 2 officers). When I inquired from the officer in which language the report is provided to a person who comes with a

complaint, the officer said it is written in Sinhala. This is an example of how plantation Tamils are alienated from the outside community through institutional policies and practices which do not respect the plantation laborers language (Tamil). Despite that the majority of staff at this police station and the majority of people who come to the station are Tamils, the reports are written in Sinhala only.

When I asked specifically about cases brought against the plantation laborers, the officer included 1) land encroachment and 2) forcible occupation and extension of house spaces. He included fights after drinking, love affairs, theft, and family cases as other examples of typical cases which the plantation community from *Sooryan* brings to his police station.

The hospital near *Sooryan* serves an area which is 95% plantation and includes the *Sooryan* plantation. The District Medical Officer (DMO) notes the following major illnesses for which people come to the hospital for treatment. They include respiratory problems caused by poor ventilation, poisoning by insecticides used at the plantation, and diarrhea. When I inquired how poisoning by insecticides is caused, she mentioned that many try to commit suicide by drinking the insecticides used at the plantation. I asked if they are provided with counseling services and she replied, "Most of the doctors in this district are Sinhalese and do not speak Tamil. How can you counsel someone if you do not speak their language?" (Interview, January 19, 1997).

I also inquired from the DMO if she was aware of any problems faced by the laborers from *Sooryan* when visiting the hospital. She mentioned that the laborers have complained of being scolded by the Sinhalese staff when they come to use the services at the hospital. She stressed that she is trying to change these practices. She also pointed to

the problem of bribes, which are often demanded from the plantation laborers by the hospital staff. The laborers feel that they will not get proper treatment unless they offer bribes to the staff at the hospital. She notes:

> When I came to this hospital six months ago, the family members of someone sick from *Sooryan* and other plantations would come to my house in the evening with envelopes with money inside. I told them that I do not take bribes. I am working to stop it in the hospital and training the staff to treat the plantation community with respect (Interview, January 19, 1997).

Summary

In this chapter, I provided the setting of *Sooryan.* I described where *Sooryan* is located and its surroundings. I elaborated on the organizational structure and the philosophy of its management and explained the work of senior management, junior management, *Kanganies,* and the plantation laborers. I explained in detail the living conditions and some of the social and religious events at *Sooryan.* I also explained the role of trade unions and their resident leaders (*Talaivars*) at *Sooryan.* I highlighted the relationship of the labor force at *Sooryan* with the outside community which is mostly Sinhalese, and with some of the government entities which discriminate against plantation laborers.

In the next chapter, I will present the categories of interpersonal conflicts, the Tamil words and phrases used to describe interpersonal conflicts in their context, and the ways they attempt to resolve these conflicts.

CHAPTER 5

LABORING AMONG CONFLICTS AT *SOORYAN*

In the previous chapter, I described the conditions under which the laborers live and work at *Sooryan*. I also explained the top down management style of the supervisors and described the community outside the plantation and its relationship with the laborers at *Sooryan*. From this broader view, I now present the words and phrases which the community at *Sooryan* uses to name "conflicts" in their language and in their context. I then present four categories of interpersonal conflicts which manifest within *Sooryan,* and with the community outside the plantation. Finally, I explain the processes the plantation laborers use in the resolution of these conflicts. Specifically, I present the role of *Talaivars*, trade unions representatives, the management, and the police in resolving personal and job related conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan.*

Naming Interpersonal Conflicts at *Sooryan*

The reader is reminded to refer to the limitations of this study, which I described in chapter 3. One of these limitations was my limited knowledge of the Tamil language. Therefore, the words and phrases, which describe the equivalent of the English language construct "conflict," are used to explain the nature of a conflict in Tamil. I have not gone beyond this because my knowledge to explain any linguistic nuances is limited. I present the words and phrases with their most appropriate meaning in English given in the parentheses. They are:

1) *Prachanai* (a problem)

2) *Sandai* (a fight or a quarrel)

3) *Sinne Sinne Sandai* (small small fights)

4) *Adi Paddi Sandai* (fighting with hands or hitting)

5) *Adikkaradhu* (to beat or to hit)

6) *Adichakolradhu* (to beat and kill)

I have used these Tamil words and phrases, where appropriate, in describing the four categories of interpersonal conflicts at *Sooryan*. This, I hope, will help explain their words and phrases in the particular context of a conflict.

Categories of Interpersonal Conflicts at *Sooryan*

The conflicts which the laborers narrate are numerous, and often occur frequently. I remember from my interviews that even when I asked general questions which were related to a laborer's family life or a religious or social festival, the answers would invariably include references to the specific problems in the lines or harsh treatment by the supervisors at work. From the individual and focus group interviews with the labor community at *Sooryan*, the trade union representatives, and the *Talaivars*, I have classified the interpersonal conflicts of the laborers into the following four categories:

1. Interpersonal conflicts in the Line Rooms

2. Interpersonal conflicts which occur in the Lines and Divisions. These are divided into three sub-categories;

A) Interpersonal conflicts in a Line

B) Interpersonal conflicts between people living in separate Lines, and

C) Interpersonal conflicts between people living in separate Divisions

3. Interpersonal conflicts which occur at work. These conflicts are divided into the following two sub-categories;

A) Interpersonal conflicts with *Kanganies* (KG) and Field Officers (FO)

B) Interpersonal conflicts with Senior Management i.e., the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent

4. Interpersonal conflicts with the community outside the *Sooryan* plantation

The above four categories are explained below. The reader is reminded to refer to the setting, which I explained in chapter 4. This will help to better understand the nature of a particular conflict. The laborers at *Sooryan* live close to each other and do almost identical work. Most of them live their entire lives on a plantation. Thus, there is very little privacy and often interpersonal conflicts are well-known amongst each other.

Interpersonal Conflicts in the Line Rooms

This category primarily consists of conflicts which occur between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between extended family members who live together in a line room.

Participants, especially women workers, mentioned various conflicts, which happen between spouses. For example, a woman referred to the difficulty of getting up early when it is cold, a common occurrence on the high-altitude plantations in the district of Nuwara Eliya. She said, "when it is cold, it is difficult to get up in the morning for work. My husband argues (*sandai*) with me that I should go to work and hits (*adikkaradhu*) me" (Interview, February 6, 1997).

The nature of spousal conflicts also depicts the economic hardships the laborers endure at the plantation. During my visits to *Sooryan*, the laborers often remarked that they could not keep up with rising prices of rice, lentils, coconuts, and other daily essentials because their daily wages at *Sooryan* are low. These economic hardships result

in conflicts between a husband and wife and among different family members. The following examples allude to these hardships and the conflicts they create among the family members at *Sooryan*. One woman worker said, "My husband hits (*adikkaradhu*) me when the food is not enough or when it is burnt" (Interview, November 12, 1996). Another woman laborer narrated that "sometimes when there is not enough food for the children and when they go to sleep, my husband fights (*sandai*) with me over it" (Interview, December 8, 1996).

The economic hardships also contribute to conflicts between a husband and a wife over deciding the future of their children. For example, a husband and a wife argue whether a child (generally a girl) should drop out from the school and help at home. In case of a boy, the conflict may involve whether to send the boy to work at one of the *Kades* in big cities so that he can supplement the family income or to let him continue with his education.

At *Sooryan*, I saw number of boys and girls who had dropped out of school. The principal of the nearby school, which many of the plantation children attend, told me that the girls generally drop out of school after grade 5 or 6 and the boys after grade 8. The boys at *Sooryan* performed various chores like taking care of a cow or working at a *Kade* in Hatton. The girls, on the other hand, helped at home. In my conversations with their parents, I found that they felt helpless in the face of economic difficulties that caused them to take their children out of school. Ironically, the same parents also believed that a better future for their children lied in their education. One woman laborer remarked, "we have no future here but want to work hard so that our children can get a good job some where other than at the plantation" (Interview, January 11, 1997).

According to the laborers, since their present income does not sustain a family, all adults in a family are expected to work. This expectation is especially true when a particular family is large and sometimes comes at a cost. As one laborer said, "if there are five people working in the family and one is not working, others will make fun of him and he may commit suicide" (Focus Group, February 16, 1997).

Expectations associated with different familial roles can also result in conflicts. One example included: "After the marriage if the wife does not bring a dowry, the in-laws send her back to her family" (Focus Group, February 16, 1997). When a newly wed woman is send back to her family, it is considered an insult to her parents. This creates a conflict between the two families. Often when a woman is sent back, the parents keep her for a while till the boy's parents or relatives come asking for the bride back from her parents.

Labor families struggle in taking care of their elder members in a line room. Since a line room is the only family dwelling where every one lives, this creates a burden on a family with elderly relatives. One laborer said, "there will be disputes among the children as to who should take care of their elderly parents" (Focus Group, February 16, 1997).

The laborers also referred to conflicts which occur due to lack of space in the line rooms. In a focus group one laborer remarked, "We have boxes, furniture, and beds--everything in the room and because of these problems (*prachanai*), sometimes we have to send some family members to sleep in another line room of a friend or a relative and this starts rumors that there is an affair going on" (Focus Group, January 11, 1997). Some

married participants said that they could not express their emotions because the living space is small and as a result, they have to "hide [their] feelings."

A recurring example both from individual and focus group interviews was that of a husband's drinking and suspicion by both husband and wife of the other having a sexual affair at the plantation. Bala narrates a case where a husband killed his wife out of suspicion that she was having an affair with another man.

> In one of the lines, a woman had an affair and the husband found out about it. Both of them used to argue over it. One day they had an argument. The husband took an empty bottle and hit (*adichakolradhu*) her very badly. The wife bled to death. The husband was taken to the police station, kept there for 10 days, and then released. He had three children from his wife. Later two children were taken by the wife's brother to Trincomalee and the youngest one is staying with the father. He has since re-married and has one child from his second wife (Interview, January 5, 1997).

A woman worker narrates an example of her husband drinking and then hitting her. "My husband used to hit (*adikkaradhu*) me after a drink. Once he hit me with a plate and the plate broke into pieces and I had injuries at two places on my leg" (Interview, January 9, 1997).

The interpersonal conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan* represent economic hardships, lack of decent housing, and adequate living space for a family. In addition, they consist of drinking and beating of wives by their husbands. The meager income of laborers forces some to take their children out of school and this causes conflicts between the parents.

Interpersonal Conflicts in the Lines and Divisions

In a Line. This sub-category of interpersonal conflicts occurs between the neighbors who live in a line. I explained under the setting in chapter 4 that the labor families live in lines and there are different kinds of lines at *Sooryan*. For example, some

10-12 families live in a single line. In a back-to-back line, this number doubles to around 24 families.

The nature of the following conflicts points to the difficult conditions under which the laborers live in lines at *Sooryan*. For example, numerous participants both in individual and focus group interviews refer to one such difficulty--fighting over water. In explaining this, the participants in one focus group noted how problems arise when one person brings four buckets and another person has only one. Since all the laborers have to go to work early in the morning, this causes delays at the water tap. People exchange abuses or insults with each other. At times they push and shove each other's buckets or each other.

In the evening when men come home, they generally drink and when they hear about the morning's incidents at the water tap, they may go out and pick a verbal or fist fight with those neighbors involved. A 39-year woman laborer lamented about the problem and said, "here [*Sooryan*], good neighbors become water pipe enemies. These pipes are old and the water leaks. Then we do not get enough water (examples of *prachanai*) and people fight" (Interview, March 9, 1997).

Other examples indicate the relationships between neighbors. Some families at *Sooryan* have small vegetable gardens. The gardens are used to grow vegetables to sell in the market or for a family's own consumption. Hence, they are extremely valuable to a family. One laborer from a focus group interview said that neighbors fight over extension of the boundaries of the vegetable gardens. Bala narrated a conflict which occurred between his family and his next door neighbor.

> Our family has not talked to the next door neighbor for the last 15 years. We share a vegetable garden with them. It started when they tried to plant a banana tree in

> our space. I do not know what the other man said to my father because I was very small then, but I remember they used bad words. Now my uncle talks to this family but the rest of us do not talk to them (Interview, March 5, 1997).

Since the laborers' housing units are very small, often families add or extend a certain part of their line room. This occurs more among larger families. The management punishes laborers who extend or build a temporary shed on the plantation. A 51 year-old woman who has been working at *Sooryan* for the last 33 years told this story.

> Once we wanted to build a kitchen and started it. People are jealous. Someone reported it to the welfare supervisor, and she reported it to the manager. We went to the *Talaivar* who went on our behalf and talked to the manager. The *Talaivar* told the manager that some other families have done this and so this family should also be allowed to build the kitchen. The manager did not agree (Interview, March 4, 1997).

Other examples in this category included a behavior of neighbor or children's fights, which draw the parents into the conflict. Participants in a focus group gave these examples. There is often a conflict when a neighbor throws garbage in another's front yard or when a neighbor's dog bites a child. All families share a common open drainage system, which runs along the side of a line. Participants indicated that some families deliberately block their portion of the drainage. This irritates a neighbor whose yard is flooded and causes a conflict. Other irritants which may lead to conflicts in lines include: someone spitting in another's yard or cutting grass from someone else's garden for their cows (Focus Group, February 16, 1997).

Between Lines. The laborers at *Sooryan* live in several independent lines. This sub-category of interpersonal conflicts includes those which manifest between families who live in separate lines. Participants from a focus group noted that alcohol consumption is high among the laborers. Often after drinking, men from a line throw

stones at another line, which leads to verbal or first fights (*sandai* or *adi paddi sandai*) among the laborers from two different lines.

The temple at *Sooryan* is a very important place for laborers at *Sooryan*. The laborers gather here for various religious events and ceremonies. When the labor community decides on repairing or building a new temple, there is often intense debate and conflict among the laborers about the location and the amount of money to be spent. At *Sooryan*, I observed the beginning of the construction of a new temple, which was then suspended. The laborers indicated that the funds for construction had been mismanaged by the members of the *Kovil* committee. The committee decided to suspend the construction until an inquiry was held.

Laborers indicated that when families in a line contribute more money towards a community or a social event than families from another line, often it contributes to conflicts between the members of the two lines. This happens when the money is being collected for a special event, like a sports game. This leads to hostilities between the members of two lines. Sport competitions on the plantation also serve as source of conflicts, especially among the youth, when the losing team attempts to sabotage the game.

Between Divisions. This sub-category presents conflicts, which happen between the laborers living in two separate divisions. In chapter 4, I have defined "division" as a unit of production. Each division has a different number of lines according to the size of its population. There are three divisions at *Sooryan*. The numbers of laborers who live in a division depend upon the productivity of each division.

It is important to note that the productivity of a division depends on the area and the altitude, and not on the skills of the laborers. During the early stages of my selecting a tea plantation for this study and while conducting research at *Sooryan*, I noticed that divisions that are more productive are located at higher altitudes and had more laborers. Since I am not an agronomist, I can not explain the phenomenon of productivity on a tea plantation any further. A more productive division has more laborers and thus, consistent availability of work. The laborers from a less productive division have fewer working days, and this is a common source of conflict among the laborers of different divisions at *Sooryan*.

For example, laborers from a division may refuse to prune tea bushes with 25 laborers because they believe that the work at hand requires more laborers. The management then offers the same work to the laborers from another division, who may accept to do the job with only 25 laborers. This causes mistrust, lack of unity, and tensions among the laborers from the two divisions. Another sources of conflict between divisions include when a person from one division crosses through another division and the people in that division do not like this particular person. This becomes serious when laborers are drunk or after sporting events. On these occasions, there is verbal boasting and arguments that their division is better than the person's who is passing through their division.

In my research proposal, I had stated that I would not participate in an actual conflict at the *Sooryan* plantation. Even though this would have been an ideal opportunity for me to collect data and understand the nature of a conflict first hand, it could have also jeopardized our (research assistants and mine) relationship with the

community and/or our safety. During the field research, even though I tried not to participate in an actual conflict there were two conflicts, which were reported to us by the laborers when I was at *Sooryan*. I describe these conflicts in the form of a vignette.

Vignette 1: Water Strike

On one Sunday when I was at *Sooryan*, several laborers told my research assistant and I that the laborers at *Sooryan* were going on a strike beginning the next day. The laborers explained that they had not been getting water. They informed us that the pipe was broken at several places and that the management had been informed but had done nothing. Since my research assistant and I were leaving *Sooryan* at the end of the day, we were not able to be present the following day when the strike was to start.

I returned after one week and was curious about the outcome of the strike. The strike had lasted for three days. During the strike, trade unions negotiated with the management. The management insisted that the laborers should call off the strike first, and then the water pipes would be repaired. The laborers remained adamant in their demands and succeeded in getting the pipes repaired on the third day.

Vignette 2: Chickens are Poisoned

Once while I was on the plantation, I was walking with my research assistant from one line to another. Along the way, we saw several laborers gathered around the house of a staff person. Many laborers knew my research assistant and I, as well as the focus of my study. As we approached closer to the house, several of them approached us and volunteered to tell what had happened.

Several labor families had lost 12 chickens that died as a result of eating vegetables from a garden which belonged to a staff member. The staff member, in order

to keep the chickens out had sprayed the garden with powerful insecticides. The families had gathered here to demand compensation for their chickens.

The staff member refused to pay for the dead chickens. The youth of *Sooryan* decided to go the police station. Once the staff member found out about their plan, he went to the police station before them and informed the police that the youth from *Sooryan* would be coming with this problem. He also told police that he did not cause the death of the chickens.

A few hours later, the youth arrived at the police station. The police officer pretended that he did not know what had happened and dismissed their complaint saying that it is common for chickens to die. The youth told the police officer how the chickens had died and demanded monetary compensation totaling 1,200 rupees (100 rupees for each chicken). The police ridiculed the youth. At this point, the youth warned that if they were not compensated, they would take revenge against the staff member. Two days later, the staff member agreed to pay 600 rupees, and the families who had lost their chickens accepted the offer. I asked some laborers if they thought it was a fair compensation given that grown up chickens were worth at least 100 rupees each. They said the families were lucky to get any compensation at all, because the staff and police generally have no regard for the laborers' problems or well being.

Interpersonal Conflicts at Work

With *Kanganies* and Field Officers. The intensive nature of work on a tea plantation requires a resident labor force. Tea is a year round crop. Therefore, the laborers at *Sooryan* form a primary work relationship with the plantation and through it with its supervisors. Laborers narrate numerous examples of their conflicts with their

supervisors who are primarily *Kanganies* and Field Officers. As explained in chapter 4, a *Kangani* is a laborer who supervises the plucking and sundry work of the laborers. A Field Officer, on the other hand, is a staff member who is in charge of a division. Although *Kanganies* are supervisors, they live in a line room just like the other laborers, whereas Field Officers live separately from the laborers in staff houses at *Sooryan*.

The laborers described various conflicts which they have with *Kanganies* and Field Officers. For example, laborers mentioned that *Kanganies* and Field Officers give them work which can not be finished in the normal 8-hour shift. This results in laborers getting less than the full "name" or wage[1] for a day's work. Another example included supervisors assigning tasks based on a woman laborer's looks or age. For example, an older woman may be given a difficult place to pluck while a younger woman is assigned to an easier place. In return, a *Kangani* expects sexual favors from the younger woman.

The laborers reported that their tea breaks are usually cut short and that the *Kangani* scolds and insults them if they complain to him. Laborers have conflicts with supervisors when the number of hours they worked is not properly counted. Participants in a focus group indicated that some laborers do not get a full "name" even when they have worked the whole day or plucked the full amount of tea leave. Women laborers indicated that their tea leaves are not properly weighed by the Field Officer. This results in some pluckers getting more wages and some getting less. During my observation on the plantation, I noticed that women tea pluckers, when getting their leaves weighed, did not check the entries, which the Field Officer made each time the leaves were weighed.

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[1] During this research, the full daily wage was 83 rupees.

When I asked a woman if she knew the weight of her tea leaves, she responded, "I have plucked tea leaves all my life. I can feel the weight."

Since the laborers work for daily wages, they only get paid for the days they are assigned work. Laborers indicated that even when they are late just by 15 or 20 minutes they are chased away by a *Kangani* or a Field officer (Focus Group, February 21, 1997). This contributes to their economic hardships. According to the laborers some *Kanganies* and Field Officers take revenge if a laborer speaks against them to a trade union representative or to the superintendent. Additionally, some Field Officers ask laborers to do their personal work at home.

A personal interview indicated an additional example of a work-related conflict with a Field Officer (FO). A 42 year-old woman narrated this story:

> One day when I was plucking in the field I had a wound on my finger and as a result I could not pluck the required amount [18 kilos] of tea leaves. I was short one kilo. However, the FO chased me and did not give me work the next day. I even begged him, in the morning and then in the evening. My husband came home from a trip to Diyagama but I did not tell him. Some neighbors told him and he went to the FO. First they had a verbal fight, then the FO took a stick and hit my husband, and this started a big fight (Interview, January 9, 1997).

A 56 year-old man, who is now retired, narrates this story of his conflict at work, "when I was a laborer, one day I was asked to work on another division. I had a hand to hand fight (*adi padi sandai*) with the laborers there. As a result, I was suspended for 5 years from work by the management (Interview, March 15, 1997).

Conflicts with the Senior Management. The Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent comprise the senior management at *Sooryan*. The laborers refer to the Superintendent as *Peria Dorai* (literally a big boss) and to the Assistant Superintendent as *Sinna Dorai* (literally a small boss). The Superintendent enjoys immense power both

within as well as outside the plantation. He has the final say on all the financial, production, and personnel related matters of the plantation. Outside the plantation, he has a good rapport and wields strong influence with the police department and with the business community.

The laborers depend on the superintendent for practically all their basic needs, including housing, work, medical facilities, and salary advances, to name just a few. In addition, the laborers depend on the superintendent for treating them fairly. In my observation of the laborers, I noticed that they were extremely afraid of the superintendent at *Sooryan*. Often, at the very sight of his jeep, a laborer would alert others to work properly.

In a focus group with the laborers at *Sooryan*, the participants provided various examples of their disputes with the senior management. For instance, the laborers complained that the management frequently promises to solve problems like water, house repairs, and renovations but it rarely fulfills these promises. The management sometimes grants favors to families, when allocating line rooms. In return, the management expects that a particular laborer would not cause troubles at *Sooryan*. Laborers explained that often they are given excessive work by the management. For example, a job of three persons is given to one laborer.

They laborers added that the management shows very little respect to them. One laborer noted, "We are treated very badly. When there is an educated or an outspoken laborer, he is humiliated by the management in front of others" (Focus Group, January 16, 1997). He further added, that "they [management] think they are the owners of this plantation when they, like us, are only employees" (Focus Group, January 16, 1997).

According to the laborers if a laborer is seen cultivating a piece of vacant land, the management immediately prohibits them to continue. However, when a Sinhalese encroaches on the plantation along the main road, the management keeps quiet.

The laborers depend on the Superintendent to approve salary advance for special needs and for religious or social festivals. Laborers noted that advances for these festivals are often late and therefore they can not properly plan and celebrate their festivals. A woman worker in a focus group reflected on the treatment laborers get from the senior management. "Workers are not treated as humans. They consider us as low persons and they get a lot more work from us than our capacity" (Focus Group, January 16, 1997).

Interpersonal Conflicts with the Community

In chapter 4, I described the community outside the *Sooryan* plantation. Essentially, it has two components. The first is the community immediately surrounding *Sooryan*, which consists of a hospital, a police station, and a few small *Kades*. It includes interactions of the laborers on government and private buses and private vans which run along the Hatton-Nuwara Eliya road and at the government railway stations in Kotegalla and Hatton. It also includes various government offices in Hatton and Talawakelle, which the laborers from *Sooryan* visit for their various needs.

The second component is the larger social, political, and economic context of Sri Lanka in which the laborers live and work. The government offices are dominated by the Sinhalese and are located in the major cities of Colombo and Kandy. These cities in addition have educational, business, and job opportunities and important government offices not found elsewhere in the country. Access to these cities by the plantation

laborers at *Sooryan* is often limited by distance and by police and army checkpoints along the main roads. At these checkpoints, due to the civil war in the country, people are thoroughly checked before they can enter the big cities of Colombo and Kandy. During this study, I observed that Tamil people rarely could pass through a checkpoint without being stopped, questioned, and having their documents scrutinized. The same was not true for the Sinhalese.

The participants in a focus group reported being treated badly at post offices and in the buses by bus conductors. They gave an example of the following: "when a pregnant Tamil woman gets on the bus, Sinhalese people do not give her a seat but when a pregnant Sinhalese woman gets on the bus, the bus conductor forces a Tamil person to give up his/her seat" (Focus Group, January 16, 1997). A Tamil man in his early 20s who had finished his "A" level examination told about his difficulty at the local post office. "They do not recognize our language rights. At the post office we can not send money because the application has to be written in Sinhala as the clerk does not know Tamil" (Interview, February 17, 1997).

Laborers added the following difficulties which often lead to conflicts. For example, *Kades* owned by Sinhalese commonly charge higher rates to Tamils. Since the laborers cannot easily go every day to shop in Hatton where basic food and other items of are comparatively cheaper, this is an irritant for many laborers. Additionally, laborers have disputes with *Kade* owners over debts. "When we get the salary we are not able to pay all the debt and this leads to fights with the *Kade* owner" (Interview, February 15, 1997).

Many laborers reported that they could not get anything done by government offices unless they offer bribes. Just like the post office, where the clerk can not fill out a money order form in Tamil, the situation is the same for getting a national identification card. A laborer has to bribe the staff at the office to fill out the application for an identification card. Every adult Sri Lankan citizen is required to carry this card. In case of the plantation laborers from *Sooryan*, they must carry it when travelling through any checkpoints or when they are in big cities or they risk being arrested if found without it by the police or army.

A personal interview with a 39 year-old mother of four children yielded this description:

> When we go to the hospital, they make the Tamil people wait in a line. The Sinhalese people come from behind or come later, go to the window, and get medicine before us. We have to bribe the staff, otherwise they will give us medicines full of water. When we go by bus, the conductor or the driver asks a Tamil person to give a seat to the Sinhalese person and they tell us this is a Sinhalese country (Interview, December 6, 1996).

The interpersonal conflicts of *Sooryan* laborers are embedded in the overall economic and political context in which plantations play a major economic role. The owners of *Sooryan* grow tea for sale. The laborers are forced to arrange their lives in order to work toward this goal. At the first glance, some of the conflicts of the laborers may seem like mere complaints. But a more critical reflection assists in understanding the manifestation of these conflicts in the overall oppressive structure of the plantation.

Laborers at *Sooryan* often referred to their conflicts as *prachanai*, or problems. The examples given in the preceding pages indicate the permanent nature of these problems. Lack of space in the line rooms, no electricity, harsh treatment at work, and lack of water and water taps are daily problems at the plantation. Outside *Sooryan*, the

government post offices and public hospitals give them discriminatory treatment. The world of a laborer, both within and outside the plantation is flooded with *prachanai* or problems. In chapter 6, I will present a detailed analysis on some the findings presented in this chapter. In the next section, I describe various mechanisms which the laborers use in resolving their conflicts.

Resolution of Interpersonal Conflicts at *Sooryan*

The process of resolving an interpersonal conflict depends upon the nature of a conflict. Conflicts of the laborers generally fall into the four categories which I described in the previous sections. However, conflicts in each of these categories can also overlap. For example, a personal conflict in the line with a *Kangani* has the potential of becoming a work-related conflict and vice versa.

Just as the sources of interpersonal conflicts at *Sooryan* are diverse, so are the processes involved in resolving them. The following conflict resolution processes were explored through personal and focus group interviews with the laborers.

Personal Strategies

In this strategy, a laborer, group of laborers or members of family try to resolve a conflict without asking or approaching someone outside the family or group of laborers. Kumari narrated a conflict which occurred in her line, and then described the process of how it was resolved:

> In our line, a husband who has three children had an affair with another woman. Both of them fought frequently. The wife complained to her brothers and they intervened. A physical fight (*adi paddi sandai*) started. As a result, they had to go to the police station. At the police station, the wife stated that she does not want to live with her husband any longer. Now she lives with her children and the husband lives with another woman. Once in a while, the husband comes to see the children (Interview, December 16, 1996).

Mala shares a personal conflict and her approach of resolving it:

> At first, my husband used to beat me after he had some drinks and I tolerated it without letting any body know. When we have a conflict (*sandai*), we try to resolve it by ourselves. I never liked outsiders solving our problems. When the neighbors ask what is the matter, I replied nothing. I have always tried to hide our problems (*prachanai*) from others (Interview, February 11, 1997).

Gauri shares a personal conflict between two laborers and how it was resolved in the field by other laborers.

> Once there was a physical fight (*adi paddi sandai*) between two women in the field. The older woman had accused the younger one of misbehaving. The younger woman had been patient for a while, but the older woman kept on scolding. The younger woman hit her with a stick. All the women in the field got together scolded both of them and made peace (Interview, February 23, 1996).

In addition to personal strategies used by the laborers to resolve their conflicts, I was also interested if the labor community used a religious or a cultural practice to resolve their conflicts on the plantation. One laborer indicated that his family had used a religious practice called *sathiam*, meaning truth. It involves both disputants going to a temple and the accused disputant swearing on burning incense that he/she has not committed a theft or committed a particular behavior for which she/he has been accused. Once the other disputant hears this, he/she agrees that there is no longer a conflict between them.

In my interviews, I inquired from various laborers if *sathiam* is still practiced at *Sooryan*. Most of them were not aware of the practice. In the next section, I describe the role of trade unions in resolving the interpersonal conflicts of the laborers of *Sooryan*.

Role of the Trade Unions

I explained in chapter 4 that the majority of the laborers who work on plantations belong to a trade union. At *Sooryan*, the laborers are represented by six different trade

unions. The names of these trade unions have also been given in chapter 4. The trade unions have their offices in the nearby town of Patna, about 15 minutes from *Sooryan.*

In my personal and focus group interviews with the various representatives of trade unions, they expressed that their primary purpose is to "look after the problems of the laborers." I inquired in a focus group if they could list the problems which the laborers generally bring to them. They problems they cited consisted of the following:

> 1. A laborer comes to us when he/she is chased away from work for being late and the Field Officer has not given work for the day.
>
> 2. A laborer who has verbally abused a *Kangani* or a Field Officer and has been chased away from work.
>
> 3. There has been a physical fight on the plantation in which a laborer or several laborers have attacked a *Kangani* or a Field Officer. The laborer/s have been suspended from work.
>
> 4. A laborer who has built a temporary shed on the plantation. The management has been informed about this and the laborer has been suspended from work or the management has taken some other disciplinary action.
>
> 5. A physical fight has occurred among the laborers at work and the superintendent has suspended those involved from work.
>
> 6. Laborers have gone on a strike. The superintendent informs the police and the police ask the trade union to resolve the dispute.
>
> 7. Laborers bring their personal problems (Focus Group, March 11, 1997).

The unions have a two-tiered mechanism of dealing with the "problems" of the laborers. Each trade union, as explained in chapter 4, has several resident labor leaders or *Talaivars* at the plantation. The number of *Talaivars* depends on the size of the membership at that particular plantation. The more the members in a particular trade union, the more the number of *Talaivars* who work on their behalf. The first tier involves a *Talaivar* who plays a very significant role in resolving many of the personal and job

related conflicts of the laborers. In the following section, I describe the role and approaches a *Talaivar* uses in resolving the conflicts of the laborers.

Talaivars as Conflict Resolvers

At *Sooryan,* all *Talaivars* are laboring men. In a focus group with *Talaivars*, I inquired about the process they use to resolve the interpersonal conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan.* They indicated that their first priority is their work as laborers, and their second priority is to their role as a *Talaivar*. The following are some of the ways they attempt to resolve interpersonal conflicts of the laborers.

Through Negotiation. A typical process for a conflict which has occurred between two neighbors in a line or a conflict involving a laborer and a supervisor at work would involve the *Talaivar* in the following way (it is assumed that the conflict is of minor nature):

1. The dispute is reported to a *Talaivar* in the evening, after he has come from work and has eaten his meal. A conflict is brought to his attention generally by a disputant who thinks she/he has been wronged.

2. The *Talaivar* talks to each disputant to "try to bring peace among them."

Through Threat. At times, *Talaivars* put pressure on a party. This happens generally when a husband is having a relationship with another woman. The pressure tactics include a threat that his conduct will be reported to the superintendent, the neighbors and/or family in his line, or to the wider plantation community.

The local police depend on *Talaivars* at *Sooryan* and seek their help to resolve the personal disputes of the laborers at the plantation. Because *Talaivars* have this standing

and recognition by the local police, they have additional power to use threats in resolving a conflict.

It is worth noting that the *Talaivars* have a monetary stake in paying attention to the conflicts of the laborers. For their role as *Talaivars*, they collect part of the dues, which a laborer pays to the union. During this study, a laborer paid 20 rupees as monthly dues to his/her trade union. Out of this a sum three rupees were paid to the *Talaivar*. Additionally, this role gives them a higher social and political recognition among the fellow laborers. Therefore, *Talaivars* protect their role on the plantation, as they do not want their privileges to be taken away. *Talaivar*s at *Sooryan* were unanimous in a focus group when they said, "we do not want the police to come on the plantation, we want to solve the disputes of the laborers" (Focus Group, January 16, 1997).

I inquired from the laborers if they ever remove a *Talaivar* from his position. The laborers indicted that they have several options available to them if they do not like a particular *Talaivar*. For example, a laborer may switch his/her membership in a trade union. One woman laborer remarked, "if we do not like a *Talaivar*, we get together and select another, or we join another trade union" (Interview, January 16, 1997).

By Taking Sides in a Conflict. The laborers belong to different trade unions at *Sooryan*. How do *Talaivar*s resolve a conflict when they know a laborer from their union is at fault in a dispute with a laborer from another union? The *Talaivar*s indicated that in resolving conflicts which are non-violent and of minor nature, they side with their member. They advocate on behalf of their union's member laborer by saying this will not happen again and assuring the other disputant that their laborer will be careful in the future.

By Being Neutral in a Conflict. There are occasions when a *Talaivar* remains neutral. This happens when there is a physical fight (*adi paddi sandai or adikkaradhu*). In this case, the respective *Talaivar* gets all the details and determines if his member is at fault. If his member is clearly at fault, then the *Talaivar*s who represent the unions of both disputants (laborers), together with additional *Talaivar*s from the line, negotiate jointly and make a decision. The laborer at fault has to comply with this decision. A typical decision will require that the party at fault pay monetary damages to the other party.

The above scenario takes place when the disputants (laborers) belong to two different trade unions. In cases when both the disputants belong to the same trade union and there has been a physical fight between the two disputants, the concerned *Talaivar* consults other *Talaivars* from his union or refers the case to his union representative. It should also be noted that some physical fights are reported to the police. In those cases, the parties sometimes may report to the police before consulting with their *Talaivars* at the plantation.

It may seem that the job of a *Talaivar* is prestigious. A *Talaivar* in a focus group narrated a story which also shows the dangers involved in the job of a *Talaivar*.

> Once there was a physical fight in our line. I went to stop the fight. The woman in the fight took a knife and cut my forehead. The *Talaivar*s got together and decided not to go to the police station and it was decided that woman would pay me one thousand rupees. Later, the *Talaivar*s reduced it to five hundred rupees. Finally, the woman paid two hundred and fifty rupees. I was in the hospital for nine days (Focus Group, January 16, 1997).

The *Talaivar*s perform their roles in several ways. First, they resolve minor conflicts of laborers. Secondly, a *Talaivar* may threaten a member of his union when it is known that the behavior of a particular member is harmful to others at the plantation.

Thirdly, they take sides with their members and advocate on their behalf in resolving a minor conflict. Lastly, when their member is involved in a physical conflict, a *Talaivar* remains neutral, and two or more *Talaivar*s make a joint decision.

In the next section, I explain the second tier of the trade unions which involves their area representatives in resolving the interpersonal conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan*.

Trade Union Representative as Conflict Resolver

A laborer may decide to approach the trade union representative directly or through his/her *Talaivar* for a work-related conflict or for any other personal conflict or a personal or family concern. Below are the usual steps taken when a work related conflict is brought to the attention of trade union representative:

1) a *Talaivar* or a laborer informs the trade union office about a conflict at work;

2) the trade union representative calls the superintendent if the matter is urgent;

3) if the case is not urgent, a letter is written by the trade union representative and hand carried or sent by mail to the superintendent; and

4) the trade union representative follows up with a telephone call to the superintendent or personally visits the plantation office and tries to resolve the conflict of the laborer with the management.

The above process is used when the nature of the conflicts is not very serious. For example, when a laborer is late for work and has been denied work for a whole day, or a laborer has constructed an addition to his/her line room or expanded his/her vegetable garden. In the case of serious conflicts (physical fights at work or termination of a

laborer), the trade union representative either files a Magistrate's Case or takes the case to the Labor Tribunal. Both the processes are explained below.

A Magistrate's Case. A Magistrate's Case is commonly referred to by trade unions as an MC case. A typical example of an MC case consists of a laborer, who has physically assaulted a Field Officer at work. The management reports the case to the police at which point the trade union approaches the management on behalf of its member and tries to resolve the conflict. The trade union tries very hard to resolve the conflict before the police file a case with the area magistrate. According to the trade union representatives in Patna, they try to amicably resolve the conflict with the management of the plantation. In case the conflict is not resolved then police files a case to the magistrate of the area. The trade union then provides legal assistance to its labor member.

A Labor Tribunal Case. The trade unions refer to a Labor Tribunal case as an LT case. A typical LT case consists of a conflict in which a laborer has been terminated from work by the management for any number of reasons. As a first step, the trade union approaches the management and tries to get the laborer re-hired. If the management refuses to re-hire the laborer, the union files a case with the Assistant Commissioner of Labor in the area. Like in an MC case, the trade union provides legal assistance to the laborer pursuing an LT case.

The trade unions representing laborers at *Sooryan* generally avoid filing either an MC or an LT case. Both of these cases, according to them, require financial and personnel resources. It is time consuming and also difficult for a laborer who has to

travel to appear before a magistrate or at the offices of the Assistant Commissioner of the Labor.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the words and phrases used by the *Sooryan* plantation community in describing their interpersonal conflicts. The Tamil word "*prachanai*" (problems) was most frequently used by the laborers to describe their conflicts. I presented four categories of interpersonal conflicts of the laborers, which encompass their lives and work at the plantation and with outside community.

I explained various ways in which, the labor community resolves various conflicts. The laborers at *Sooryan* described a number of ways in which they personally resolve their conflicts. One strategy they employ is to simply live with a conflict. The trade union representatives and *Talaivars* play an active role in resolving personal and work related conflicts of the laborers. The trade unions representing *Sooryan* also assist laborers in a Magistrate (MC) or a Labor Tribunal (LT) case. In addition, the trade union representatives spend considerable time in resolving the conflicts of the laborers by talking directly to the management at *Sooryan*.

In the next chapter, I will present an analysis and compare the interpersonal conflict resolution practices of *Sooryan* community with the mainstream Mediation model used in North America. I will also make recommendations for educators, practitioners, and for future research in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

A RIGHT TO EXPRESS OUR PROBLEMS

An Analysis, Comparison and Recommendations

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the interpersonal conflict resolution practices of the laborers at *Sooryan*. I also contrast the mainstream North American Mediation model with the conflict resolution practices of the laborers at *Sooryan*. Finally, I present a set of recommendations for practitioners and educators in the field of conflict resolution as well as recommendations for further research. I conclude the chapter by offering a reflection on conducting research in Sri Lanka.

Analysis

1) First, I feel it is important to briefly trace how the conflict resolution practices of the plantation Tamils have evolved over time. It is significant to note that these practices evolved along side a process in which plantation laborers progressively lost control over their lives. This evolution is based on the literature, which I reviewed in chapter 2 and the findings, which I presented in chapter 5. Figure 6.1, depicts how the conflict resolution practice of the plantation Tamils evolved over time. It starts from their village based *panchayat* practices in India to the current conflict resolution practices of the laborers at *Sooryan*.

In India, villagers used either a caste or a village based *panchayat* for the resolution of their conflicts. The villagers were familiar with both of these mechanisms, as they were an integral part of the village and caste structures in India at the time. In the second phase, once the laborers emigrated to Sri Lanka to work on the British-run

plantations, they were still connected to their villages through the head *Kanganies*. Head *Kanganies* as stated in chapter 4 were chosen from among the laborers. As such they knew the laborers, their extended families, and spoke the same language. They also knew their social and cultural customs and had the same Hindu religion as the laborers. The British planters depended on them for recruiting and supervising the laborers. The laborers depended on head *Kanganies* for resolving their family and work related problems and disputes. In their new role as supervisors, they also took over the old functions of village *panchayats*. Thus, for laborers a head *Kangani* maintained the crucial village link while they worked on plantations in Sri Lanka.

Conflict Resolution Practices in India	Conflict Resolution Practices on Early Plantations	Current Conflict Resolution Practices at *Sooryan*
→ Through a Village or Caste based *Panchayat*	→ Through a Head *Kangani*	Through a *Talaivar*, Trade Union Representative, Police or Superintendent

Figure 6.1 Evolution of Conflict Resolution Practices of Plantation Tamils

The current conflict resolution practices of the laborers at *Sooryan* involve *Talaivar*s who essentially represent outside organizations, trade unions. Some of the

trade unions, in addition to representing the laborers, are also affiliated with various political parties in Sri Lanka. In the present situation, the superintendent represents the interests of a corporation, which owns the plantation. The police are primarily at the disposal of a plantation or group of plantations, which as discussed in chapter 2, enjoy immense political power in the region. One source of this power comes when a plantation uses the services of police for its own functions. For example, *Sooryan*, which is owned by a private company, calls the local police to be present on the plantation on the day salaries are distributed to the laborers. Hollup (1994) provides a broader picture of the power of the plantations by noting, "labour conflicts are sometimes curbed by the interference of the state, which protects the plantation owners (the Corporations) and the managers against the workers. Police forces are sent to protect the management during times of labour unrest" (p. 203). Laborers at *Sooryan* on the other hand, have very little power and consequently are denied basic rights. For example, the police station serving *Sooryan* issues a report in the Sinhala language to Tamil laborers.

2) The nature of interpersonal conflicts at *Sooryan* shows a character of permanence. This permanence results from various structural factors including an authoritarian style of management, monotonous work and generations of laborers living in dilapidated conditions. For example, the availability of one water tap for 10 to 12 families in a line is a daily reminder of a permanent problem. This problem results when laborers fight over taking turns or when some one fills too many buckets while others are waiting. The delays cause them concern over being late for work and thus being denied work for the day by a *Kangani*. The nature of their conflicts is very accurately articulated

in laborers' language as "*prachanai*", a problem. The laborers point to water, salary, decent housing, and harassment by the Sinhalese officials in the city as the major sources of their problems, which cause conflicts. Since the primary goal of an individual plantation is to maximize profits for its owners and the country's goal is to maximize its tea exports very little attention is paid to the daily problems of laborers at *Sooryan*.

3) The women laborers work both at home and pluck tea leaves. They are often victims of their husbands' beatings at home as well as harassment by men supervisors at work. Yet, they are absent in seeking redress to their conflicts by being a conflict resolver. This situation is reinforced by the male *Talaivars'* socialization to believe that men give better advice than women do. Men also hold all supervisory positions at *Sooryan*. Therefore, according to the *Talaivars* at *Sooryan*, the role of conflict resolver must remain with men.

4) The conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan* also suggest what Freire (1990) calls "self-depreciation" which he asserts comes when people internalize the attitudes and opinions of their oppressors' (p. 49). The laborers at *Sooryan* are called thieves by the management when they look for firewood on the plantation, the only source of fuel available to them. They are called dirty because they live in crowded conditions in small line rooms provided by the management with no running water, electricity, proper drainage or latrines, and poor ventilation. They are called alcoholics when they drink due to lack of appropriate recreation facilities and a monotonous work all year-round. They are labeled "terrorists" simply because they are Tamils, although they are not a party to

the civil war being fought between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam).

During my interviews and informal conversations with the laborers, I often heard them referring to one as a thief or as dirty. Other remarks included laborers being lazy, uneducated, and without having any potential for future. This internalization of oppression pits them to fight against each other and is often expressed in violent conflicts. In chapter 5, I gave many examples from line rooms, lines and at work in which conflicts between laborers turned violent. In seeking redress to their problems at *Sooryan*, the resolution is often horizontal and violent. It is not vertical, towards the management, the owner and creator of the problems. Neither, it is aimed at the government, the policies of which allow the existence of a more than century old system of plantations, which exploit laborers.

5) The literature in chapter 2 indicates that the creation of plantations resulted in laborers losing their ability to organize on their own. The term "organize" means a group or a society's ability to discuss its social, political, and economic concerns and to determine a course of action(s) to meet its objectives. From my observations and through interviews with the laborers, the current organization by laborers at *Sooryan* is marginal at best. For example, even though the membership and office bearers of the Funeral, *Kovil* and Estate Committees are comprised of laborers, the management controls the finances of these committees. Each laborer pays monthly dues, which are deducted from his/her monthly salary. When a committee requires funds the office bearers request them in advance from the management. These requests are often delayed thus interfering with

the planning for a given event. Some requests for funds are also denied if the management feels the event would disturb the functions of the plantation in any way. The management also keeps an eye on outspoken laborers at *Sooryan*. These outspoken laborers are humiliated by the management when they raise genuine concerns felt by the labor community. It is not surprising therefore, that the laborers at *Sooryan* do not meet on their own to "organize" or to discuss their common concerns or problems, for to do so is to risk punishment and/or humiliation. Any concern or problem has to be channeled through one of the recognized systems by the management. The fact that all the trade unions who represent laborers at *Sooryan* are staffed by outsiders and have offices outside the plantation clearly shows management's resolve against laborers organizing on their own at the plantation.

6) Lederach (1991) asserts that "[c]onflicts are, in every sense of the word, cultural events" (p. 166). This assertion can be true only when a society is allowed to flourish and grow without much outside control. It is not found in plantation societies, which according to Beckford are complete economic institutions. Although people celebrate their festivals, attend temples and churches, and youth play sports, all this celebration comes second to the overall goal of the plantation--to grow tea for sale. As Beckford (1983) notes the plantation "binds every one in its embrace to the one task of executing the will of its owner or owners" (p. 55). Thus the nature of interpersonal conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan* at best represents an oppressive political and economic design which constrains the culture of the laborers in order that plantations can achieve their economic goals. As discussed earlier, the planters' need to reach their goal

is evident in their maintaining a strict control over the laborers. As Beckford (1983) explains, "plantations resorted to the importation of labor. . . partly because people far from home and their families are easier to control than indigenous people in their own environment" (p. 59). Therefore, the current conflicts of the laborers at *Sooryan* are not their own cultural events. Rather, they are structural manifestations of a plantation system which has minimal, if any, regards for the laborers.

7) Outside *Sooryan*, there are very few social, political, cultural, and vocational opportunities accessible to the laborers. Despite its oppressiveness, it is ironic that *Sooryan* plantation also serves as a solace for the laborers from known and unknown problems from outside. This creates a greater tolerance towards their personal and work related problems at *Sooryan*. As Beckford (1983) adds:

> plantation is a binding force that welds people on it together. It is unifying. Everyone owes his [her] existence to it. To rebel against it is to threaten one's own survival, for alternative opportunities are normally hard to find (p. 54).

Many laborers at *Sooryan* are adamant that they do not want their children to work as plantation laborers. They encourage their children to get an education or to go overseas for better job opportunities. The hopes of laborers at *Sooryan* are also shared by Beckford (1983) who notes, "Those still fully immersed in the plantation sub-culture aspire to getting their children away from it, even if they see no possibility of getting 'out' themselves" (p. 65). Professor S. Sivathamby reflects on the opportunities available to the future generations and suggests that the only way to move up on the plantation is to make a horizontal move away from the plantation. There are no vertical opportunities at a plantation.

8) The laborers of *Sooryan* are invisible from the larger society in the country. They are invisible socially primarily because the nature of their work and the plantation system confines them to plantations. They are invisible in the bigger picture of the government and its agencies, as they do not easily get jobs. For example during 1986-87, the Sinhalese enjoyed an employment rate of 91.2% in state services, 87.7% in provincial services, and 88.1% in government services. The corresponding rates of plantation Tamils were only 0.1%, 0.2%, and 0.5% respectively (Manikam, 1997, p. 5).

This is only one example of their invisibility in the greater society. At *Sooryan*, many basic, yet essential, needs of the laborers are not taken care of. For example, when a child is born, the Estate Medical Assistant (EMA) at the plantation issues a certificate. According to the laborers many of parents think it is a birth certificate. The actual process of obtaining a birth certificate requires a further step of going to a *katchery* (local court). The birth certificate is required to obtain a national identity card and the national identity card is required among other things to move freely in the country. The invisibility becomes concrete when according to a woman laborer "if parents do not have identity cards, it is difficult for children to get one."

In the next section, I present a comparison of the conflict resolution practices of the laborers at *Sooryan* plantation with the mainstream mediation practices in the United States. This comparison is built from chapter 2, in which I reviewed the literature, and chapter 5, in which I presented the conflict resolution practices of the *Sooryan* labor community. The purpose of this comparison is to elicit dominant practices of a plantation

society, to compare *Sooryan*'s practices with a mediation model from a non-plantation society, and to pose challenges to practitioners in the field of conflict resolution.

Comparison

Table 6.1 presents four dimensions and their respective manifestations in both the North American Mediation model and the conflict resolution practices at *Sooryan*. For example, in the first dimension, a mediator in the United States is trained to be neutral when mediating between two disputants. Wehr and Lederach (1991) describe the nature of the neutrality practiced in mediation in the United States. They state:

> In the North American field of intergroup and interpersonal conflict management, for example, mediation is commonly defined as a rather narrow, formal activity in which an impartial, neutral third party facilitates direct negotiation. Mediator neutrality is reinforced by their coming from outside the conflict, facilitating settlement, then leaving (p. 86).

However, a *Talaivar* at *Sooryan* chooses from multiple roles according to the nature of the conflict. For example, he may threaten one of his union members involved in a conflict when it is clear that the behavior of that member is unacceptable to the labor community. An example of this behavior would include a man beating his wife. In a dispute where a member has used violence against another member from a different trade union, several *Talaivar*s jointly decide a course of action. Whereas, a *Talaivar* whose member is at fault remains neutral. The roles of *Talaivar*s at *Sooryan* resemble the mediator roles most commonly found in conflict resolution models from high-context and collectivist societies. Unlike, a mediator in the US Mediation Model, who is often not known to the disputing parties, a *Talaivar* at *Sooryan* knows the disputants as he lives along with them in one of the lines.

Table 6.1 North American Mediation Model vs. Conflict Resolution Practices of the *Sooryan* Plantation

Dimension	North American Mediation Model	Conflict Resolution Practices at *Sooryan*
Role of Mediator	*Neutral	*Neutral *Takes Side *Uses Threat[1]
Context (person And process)	*Low-context *Individualism	*Multiple Contexts
Hierarchy	*Socialized in equality of all individuals	*Socialized in organizational and caste hierarchies
Choice and Mobility	*Highly mobile and has choices including Mediation	*Limited mobility and limited choices in plantation and society in general

The second dimension relates to understanding a society through its particular context. In case of the United States, Hall's (1976) and Triandis's (1995) works are useful in understanding the process of mediation. As evident from the literature, the process and the role of mediator function in a low-context society and show traits of individualism.

[1] Here the role of a *Talaivar* is compared with a North American Mediator.

For example, the mediation process which I experienced at the Small Claims court in Northhampton, Massachusetts and described it in chapter 2, was conducted in a low-context environment. The process of the mediation was communicated through step by step instructions. Nothing else was discussed. Our (disputants') relationship was also one of low-context. We spoke only when asked and said exactly what each of us wanted from the mediation session. The whole process and the relationship of the parties involved lasted for only five minutes.

On the other hand, describing a plantation society by using only Hall's and Triandis's works would limit our understanding of societies which are rooted in an exploitative system of plantations. Therefore, a plantation like *Sooryan* has to be understood as consisting of multiple contexts, which are outlined in chapter 2. For example, although laborers of *Sooryan* are members of several trade unions, their basic demands of water and housing are not met. It shows that the plantation structure is very powerful to the extent that it limits what a trade union can do for the laborers on a plantation. Additionally, some trade unions like Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) are also political parties. For political parties, the union membership of their laborers on a plantation constitutes a vote bank, which can be tapped every time elections are called. In order not to jeopardize its vote bank, a political party would not make excessive demands from the management.

The third dimension relates to the values of individualism in the United States versus the socialization of a plantation society in its organizational and caste hierarchies.

A society like United States is rooted in the equality of its individuals. This socialization is described by Bellah et al., (1985). They note:

> Individualism lies at the very core of American culture. We believe in the dignity, indeed in the sacredness of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious (p. 142).

This socialization then forms part of the process used when disputants from a low-context and individualist society seek a resolution of a particular dispute or conflict. As I also reviewed in chapter 2, people from individualist and low-context societies prefer professionals of their choice in order to seek resolution of a conflict.

On the other hand, laborers at *Sooryan* live under caste and organizational hierarchies, which are present both on the plantation and in the larger society. The plantation Tamils are a minority ethnic group in the country. Even though, they are in the overwhelming majority of the *Sooryan* plantation population, they are treated in the same manner at both levels. For example, Hollup (1994) notes that since many plantation laborers lacked citizenship they were called "aliens", "non nationals", "Indians", or "*kalatoni*" (illicit immigrants) by the Sinhalese. As a result they "experienced a feeling of social, economic, and political insecurity" (p. 205).

In the larger society, Hollup (1994) notes that employment opportunities and other resources are generally controlled by the "landowning aristocrat class of high caste Sinhalese (*Govigama, Karava*) who hold political power" (p. 205). On the plantation, laborers are managed by a high caste Sinhalese elite from the cities of Colombo and Kandy. The laborers live not only at the bottom at *Sooryan*, but they also occupy a low

status in the larger society, which is socialized to treat people on the basis of their caste or class. This parallel system of control both within and outside the plantation also extends in to the area of conflict resolution and offers them limited choices to seek long-term solutions to their many problems.

Finally, people in the United States generally enjoy a great deal of economic and social mobility, and this accord them more choices, which the laborers at *Sooryan* cannot even imagine. The laborers are tied to the plantation system for their survival and therefore, are likely to try to live with a conflict especially with the management. For conflicts with fellow laborers, the resolution often has a violent manifestation.

Recommendations

In this section recommendations are made for educators, non-governmental organizations, and trade unions, as well as recommendations for further research.

For Educators

In this category, I include educators at the national level in Sri Lanka. During my research in the country, I had conversations with the officials of United Nations International Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) who oversee a program called Education for Conflict Resolution (ECR). The program is implemented by the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka. The goal of the program is to train teachers and students in the concepts of conflict resolution and to equip them with skills and knowledge, which would help them learn new ways to resolve interpersonal conflicts. According to these officials, ECR currently does not include the interpersonal conflicts, which manifest among the plantation Tamil labor community, in its curriculum. This case study from

Sooryan can serve as pilot for their strengthening the current curriculum of ECR. The appropriate findings of this study can be disseminated for the ECR program. In addition to being inclusive, the national ECR, through incorporating the conflict resolution practices of the laborers, can create a greater understanding and empathy among the majority Sinhalese to the unique problems of plantation laborers. Additionally, the greater society can learn from the plantation community of their hopes and aspirations for themselves, for each other, and for the country.

For Non-Governmental Organizations and Trade Unions

The NGOs and various trade unions working with *Sooryan* laborers should structure their programs with an aim of giving the laborers a control over the process and outcome of a program. A training program, for instance, can be best strengthened if it is "elicitive" in nature. According to Lederach (1995) an elicitive approach "undertakes training as an opportunity and an encounter for participants in a given setting to discover and create models of conflict resolution in the context of their setting" (p. 64). The approach will assist trade unions representatives and *Talaivars* in properly unearthing the problems of the laborers from their context and seeking a long-term solution.

The trade unions should encourage plantation owners to look for laborers in the free market thus freeing the laborers on the plantations to explore other opportunities outside the plantation. Trade unions should demand for a flexible work structure where the laborers work on the plantation and also have time for other opportunities like learning a vocational skill. Community organizing and education can not be successful

from outside but only by making the plantation laborers the owners and the key players in addressing their conflicts.

For Further Research

While I was in Sri Lanka, I had conversations with the staff of several NGOs, university professors, and trade union representatives. At several stages, I shared the findings of my research study and sought their advice. During this period, several things became clear to me. First, this is the first study to explore the nature of interpersonal conflicts of plantation laborers and the mechanism they use to resolve them. Secondly, there is lack of unity though not commitment among the NGOs and trade unions working with the plantation communities. Thirdly, there is widely held perception among the grassroots organizations that research is reserved for academicians who are either teaching or are affiliated with big universities in Sri Lanka, or who come from abroad.

My recommendations broadly address these three issues. First, the staff of NGOs, trade union representatives, youth and the laborers at the plantations can benefit from learning how to conduct research. This would demystify that research can only be done by experts or outsiders. Additionally, this will make them owner of their own stories and give them confidence.

As evident from this case study, there is very little organizing on the plantation by the laborers themselves. Currently the women are absent from leadership roles in trade unions. During this research, I did not find a single woman working in the six trade unions which represent laborers at *Sooryan*. Additionally very few NGOs have women in their staff. The trade unions and NGOs should foster unity among themselves and create

collaborative programs for the plantations. They should realize that their disunity is a victory for the owners of the plantations. Efforts should be aimed at creating capacities of the laborers to organize socially and politically on the plantation.

Conclusion and Reflection

During the study, I often wondered whether exploring interpersonal conflicts of the *Sooryan* community would help them. I have ended up feeling that it was indeed useful. I strongly feel that it is only by understanding the nature of conflicts of a plantation like *Sooryan* that the government, trade unions, community organizers, and educators can see what is missing or weak in their programs. To the extent that this study poses challenges to these organizations to understand the dehumanized conditions in various aspects of laborers' life at *Sooryan*, I feel the study is significant.

The literature reviewed in chapter 2, the setting described in chapter 4 and the narratives explained in chapter 5 clearly demonstrate the oppressive nature of the plantation life, its work, and the bleak future it holds for the laborers in Sri Lanka. In the light of permanent problems (*prachanai*) of the laborers, in lines, at work, and in the community at large, any intervention to resolve these problems has to vigorously advocate on behalf the laborers for long term solutions. It would be a mistake for practitioners to simply learn techniques of conflict resolution and work in a society like *Sooryan*. The techniques may be useful, but unless a greater understanding of the concrete context of a plantation is understood, they too will become permanent interventions leading to the permanent problems of the laborers. The advocacy is needed to seek alternatives for the laborers.

The life of laborers resembles a tea bush on the plantation. A tea bush is cultivated at an appropriate time, fertilized, and pruned every so often. Every effort is made to keep it at a certain height so that leaves can easily be plucked and made into tea for sale. A laborer, who sustains the plantation is also pruned like a tea bush when he/she is insulted by the manager and sees no future but to remain on the plantation so that leaves from the tea bush can be continually plucked for his/her master, every day of the year. Even the superintendent of *Sooryan* admitted, "slavery can not continue forever." Advocacy is needed so that laborers can no longer be pruned.

The organizations, which work with plantation communities, can learn from Vignette #1 and #2 that the ingredients of organizing are present in the community at *Sooryan*. The youth of *Sooryan* are vibrant and want to work for their communities. Many of them are determined that they would not take the same path as their parents took to work on the plantations. The youth want to explore the larger society and the promises it holds for them and for their children. Towards the end of this research, many youth and their parents shared a desire to meet members of the Sinhalese community in Colombo.

Encouraged by their desires to meet youth of the larger community in Colombo, I arranged a training program in which youth from *Sooryan* and youth from Colombo city participated. The training workshop was sponsored by the Sri Lanka Foundation (SLF), a national NGO in the country. The goal of the weekend workshop was to raise awareness of different communities in the country and to learn about each other's problems. It was titled "A Day of Critical Learning and Friendship." There were 35 participants in the workshop, 18 from *Sooryan* and 17 from Colombo.

One activity during the workshop involved listing what the youth thought should be considered a "Human Right." Several great ideas were generated. One human right that caught my attention was written by an 18-year-old youth from *Sooryan*. It read, "The right to express one's problems."

This dissertation is a small step in understanding the life and particularly the problems of the laborers at a plantation. Today, Sri Lanka greatly depends on plantation laborer for its tea exports. Yet, this community is absent in the larger society and does not benefit from the profits its helps to generate. Amidst this, how can the government, trade unions, and conflict resolution practitioners create hope for a plantation community? To begin with, they can start to actualize the "right" articulated by the youth at *Sooryan*.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF AFFILIATION WITH THE UINVERSITY OF PERADENIYA IN KANDY, SRI LANKA

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தொலைபேசி இல.
Telephone Nos.

උප උපදේශක
துணை வேந்தர்
Vice - Chancellor } 08—88151

කාර්යාලය
அலுவலகம்
Office } 08—88301—5 (five lines)

ලේඛකාධිකාරී
பதிவாளர்
Registrar } 08—88102

මුදල්භාර
காசாளர்
Bursar } 08—88104

1942 - 1992

FIFTY YEARS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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பேராதனைப் பல்கலைக்கழகம், ஸ்ரீ லங்கா
UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA

අපේ යොමුව
எமது இல.
Our Ref.

ඔබේ යොමුව
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Your Ref.

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பேராதனை
Peradeniya

දිනය
திகதி
Date

May 27, 1996

Our Ref. DA/01

Mr.Andrew A.Jilani,
505, K Street,
NE Washington,
DC 20002.

Dear Sir

Registration as a Casual Graduate Student Department of Sociology

This has reference to your letter dated 28th April 1996, addressed to the Vice Chancellor on the above subject.

On the recommendation of the Head, Department of Sociology, and the Dean, Faculty of Arts, the Vice Chancellor has approved your request to enroli as a Casual Graduate Student attached to the Department of Sociology of this Faculty.

As a Casual Graduate Student you are required to pay following fees.

Registration fees	:- Rs.300/-
Academic fees	:- US $.600/- per year
Library Registration fees	:- Rs.100/- per year
Library Deposit	:- Rs.2000/-

Please note that you can make the above payments on your arrival in Sri Lanka.

Thanking You,
Your faithfully,

Gamini Wijekoon
Senior Assistant Registrar,
Faculty of Arts.

Copy:- Head, Department of Sociology

HEAD
Department of Sociology

TELEPHONE : 08 - 88151 & 08 - 88104 - KANDY TELEX : 22046 UPDN CE SRI LANKA

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM THE MANAGEMENT
OF *SOORYAN* PLANTATION

[Name of the Plantation Company Omitted[1]]

6th July, 1996

Mr. Andrew A. Jilani
26/1 Hewaheta Road
Kandy

Dear Sir,

We refer to your request to visit [name of the plantation], and meet the Plantation workers in connection with the graduate studies you are undertaking through the Department of Sociology in the University of Peradeniya.

Whilst we are pleased to grant your request, it should be clearly noted that your work on the estate should be confined to the course you are doing at the university, and should not in any way interfere with the day to day management of the Estate.

We reserve the right to request to leave the Plantation if we find that your presence on the Estate is affecting the management of the plantation.

We are also not liable for your safety or health or any injury or death whilst you are on the Plantation.

You will be required to make your own arrangements regarding travelling to and from the Estate, and your board and lodging on the Estate.

We attach herewith copy of a letter addressed by us to the Superintendent of [name of the plantation omitted] authorizing you to conduct your study.

Your Faithfully,
[Name Omitted]

Chief Executive Officer
[Name of the Plantation Company Omitted]
cc. Superintendent

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[1] The name of the management company, its executive officer, and the name of the plantation have been omitted to protect the identity of those who were interviewed for this study.

APPENDIX C

ENGLISH INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Contract between Mr. Andrew A. Jilani and Mr./Mrs.....

This contract is between Mr. Andrew A. Jilani, a doctoral candidate in education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in the United States, on one part, and Mr./Mrs....., a laborer of the *Sooryan* plantation in Sri Lanka, on the other part.

Mr. Jilani Proposes to make several interviews with Mr./Mrs..... concerning interpersonal conflicts, which manifest among the laborers at *Sooryan* and the processes laborers use in resolving these conflicts. He proposes to record these interviews to inform his dissertation study. Mr. Jilani agrees that he will guard the names and other identities of the laborers who are interviewed for his study.

Mr./Mrs.....gives his/her permission to record the interviews, and Mr. Jilani agrees that the information gathered be used in a confidential manner in his dissertation.

Date----------

Mr. Andrew A. Jilani ---------- Mr./Mrs.----------

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